

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time B 2018

It has been a tough 3 weeks for anyone who is Catholic. The stories of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report, the news surrounding the cover up of the sexual abuse perpetrated by the former Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal McCarrick, and then the letter of Archbishop Vigano, the former Vatican Ambassador to the US, in which he alleged that there was a concerted cover up by Vatican officials, including the Pope, regarding the case of Cardinal McCarrick – which he released exactly at the same time when Pope Francis was visiting Ireland and meeting with victims of clergy abuse. Fortunately, some of those allegations of Archbishop Vigano have already been shown to be rather dubious. Still, what a mess – a terribly sad mess. Like you, I have felt anger, shame and disbelief, and have been deeply disheartened. Understandably, some Catholics may think, forget it. It's time to leave. Enough of this – and enough of the abuse I take at work or at school or at gatherings of family and friends regarding my Catholic faith. I'm outta here. But really, is that what should we do?

In response to that question, I am going to share with you some reflections from Katie Prejean McGrady, a young American Catholic speaker and author, from Bishop Robert Barron, the Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, whose video presentations are well known and widely respected in the Catholic world, as well as my own thoughts.

What should we do? Well, this is exactly the wrong time for us to leave. God's church needs us more than ever. We begin by praying. More than we ever have, with more fervor, passion and hope than ever before. We cry out in anguish, we cling to the merciful and just God, and we beg him to cast out from the church all that is evil and shed light on the truth.

And we go to Mass. We sing, we pray, we listen to the Word of God, we receive the Eucharist, and we go forth proclaiming the Gospel with our very lives, knowing full well that without the Mass, our faith will wither, and without us, the church will not be who she needs to be in this world.

We need to demand transparency from the hierarchy of the Church. We must insist upon independent and thorough investigations, from top to bottom. We need to demand of our bishops that no complaint go uninvestigated, no file unopened. It all must be revealed, no matter what may be found and no matter how hard it may be to see. The only way to heal this wound is to expose it completely so that the infection can be completely dug out.

Yes, when we stare into the face of the sexual abuse and grave sins that happened, it may be far easier to simply walk away. And when people go looking for answers to injustices in the church, sometimes lies are told and sides are almost always chosen. We look at this situation and think: “How can I stay here, in the midst of this sinfulness and dishonesty? Surely there’s someplace better.” But there isn’t. Despite the hurt and confusion and fear and doubt, we are called to remain, firmly rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ established this church, built it upon a rock and calls us to stay. So we stay – and proudly and without hesitation declare that we are Catholic, and we live our Catholic faith more boldly than ever before.

What else should we do? Besides praying, we need to reflect on why we are Catholic. First, let’s consider why we are not Catholic. We are not Catholic because of the men in the Roman collars who do or do not do the right thing. As Bishop Robert Barron said in his Youtube video this past Thursday, we are not Catholics because of the moral excellence of our leadership.

Rather we realize we are Catholic because we know Jesus Christ established this church, unites us in this church, and even in this time of turmoil and confusion is very much present in the church. We are Catholic because of our steadfast belief in our Triune God; we are Catholics because we know that we belong to this community of believers, both saints and sinners, that make up the Church. We are Catholic because of our need for the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist; we are Catholic because of our devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary and the saints. We are Catholic because we realize the truth of the words of St. Peter, that even in these difficult times, “Lord, it is good for us to be here – and we need to be here!”

This past week I did a two-day road trip to the most eastern part of Ontario. There, just to the northeast of the city of Cornwall, is a lovely rural area called Glengarry. Glengarry is in fact the cradle of Catholicism in Ontario. For it was there, in the 1780s, that a large number of Catholics from the north of Scotland, led by their parish priest, Alexander Macdonnell, settled. These devout Catholics quickly established a school, a small seminary, and by the year 1821 had built a very large stone church, in the neo-Classic style, named St. Raphael's. St. Raphael's became the administrative centre of the church in Upper Canada. In time, the church spread throughout the province, but St. Raphael's remained its mother church.

Sadly, in 1970, an electrical fire destroyed the church, leaving behind only its massive stone exterior walls which remained standing. The parishioners quickly made a decision. They would keep the stone walls and even reinforce them. They then decided to build a new church which was literally attached to the southwest wall of the old church.

The ruins of the old church have been declared a National Historic Site by the Government of Canada. When I visited the ruins, I was deeply moved but what I saw. The site is lovingly taken care of by the residents of the region. On important occasions, outdoor masses are still held in the ruins of the old church. But when I walked around the ruins of the old church as well as the new church, I realized, that in light of what has happened in these last few weeks, what I saw was symbolic of how we need to move forward. Yes, we may need to “burn down” that small part of the old church that is sinful and shameful. But please remember that so, so much of the old church is good and holy. Hence we need to hold onto, cherish and even strengthen what was good and holy in the old church as we commit ourselves to move forward with a new church that is freed of dishonesty and abuse and shame.

In our 2nd reading today St. James reminds us to not just hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word. How right he is. In fact, in these dark times, we need to be hearers of the Word, believers in the Word, lovers of the Word, and doers of the Word. The church needs us. So we don't leave. We stay and live out our Catholic faith – for the glory of God, for the health of the church, and the benefit of all of us who make up the church.

And God bless you, dear People of God.