



20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - YEAR B HOMILY BY REV. AL SCESKI

During this month of August, the gospel at all of our Sunday Masses have been taken from the 6th Chapter of Saint John's Gospel, the great "Bread of Life" discourse. I really thought that I would be giving a homily each week on a different aspect of the Holy Eucharist.

But of course, for the past few weeks I have been talking about the Attorney General's Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse.

I am assuming that after three years with you as your pastor, you know that I don't shy away from talking about things but I have to say for me personally this is very difficult because I too am filled with anger, disgust, sadness and complete frustration at the sins of my brother priests and the sins of Church leadership in the wake of the sickening details that have come out in the release of this report.

I have had a few parishioners already this week tell me that they can no longer be part of the Church; others that they can't be involved in parish ministries at this time; some have told me they will not support the diocese and the parish financially; still others who tried to give voice to what they are feeling and realize that there isn't really a venue for the laity to be heard. I am not sure that there is a real place for us priests in the trenches to be heard either.



But as I thought about how difficult this is for us---laity and clergy—and all the emotions we are going through, I realized that it cannot be about us! It really has to be about the victims, about the survivors, about the safety of our children.

One of the things that I have been uncomfortable about this week is the emphasis on what we have done to alleviate the problem of clergy sexual abuse in the past 16 years since 2002. We HAVE made strides and we continue to do so but as I said to someone this past week, “If a husband cheated on his wife twenty years ago but keeps on insisting “look how good I have been for the past 16 years”, it falls on deaf ears. The wife is filled with pain and hurt and anger at the infidelity and she cannot think about the good things the husband has done.

This is true for us in the church as well. We have heard horrible, sinful, detestable things about the priests and bishops who should have been faithful and watching out for the Church and it is awfully hard to think about the good things.

What we need to do now is acknowledge our pain and hurt and anger and be honest. Some in the Church want to run away from the Church itself; some want to sweep it under the rug; others just want it to go away. None of these things are the solution.

In a number of places in the gospels, Jesus tells us that only the child-like can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And he is right. But that means the childlike NOT the childish. What the Church needs now more than ever are adult Christians who are able to face this problem head on. We need to be honest about the issues, we have to deal with a culture which allows it to continue and be covered up, and we need to have adult, honest, blunt discussions about what it is that Jesus demands of us.



This will take courage, honesty and a strong faith. Maybe this does bring us back to today's Gospel. Jesus is the Bread of Life who gives eternal life to those who receive Him. Every day when I celebrate Mass, right before I receive Holy Communion, I pray silently the following prayer:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through your Death gave life to the world, free me by this, your most Holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments and never let me be parted from you.”

Free me from my sins...free me from all evil...keep me faithful to your commandments...never let me be parted from you.

You see, it is what Jesus does in and through us that matters. It is Jesus who frees us from our sins and from all evil and keeps us faithful to his commandments; it is Jesus who allows us to never be parted from him.

The trouble is that the Church often forgets this. We think it is about us. Our gifts, Our talents. Our abilities. We think that we have all the answers. We assume we know where the Lord is leading us and so often we are just listening to our own voices.

We usually think, “not God's way but MY way” and in doing so we inevitably fall into sin and along the way we crush the faith and innocence of the little ones in our midst. Take a look at the history of the Church and tell me if I am wrong.

The only answer is Jesus Christ. He is the one who gives eternal life. He is the one who brings healing.



There is another pray that the priest has the option of saying silently before receiving Holy Communion and it goes like this:

“May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.”

It is only by receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—and truly be changed by it—that the Church can find healing in mind and body. We can never grow weary of doing what is right; we can never be afraid to speak the Truth. It will be difficult but we must always remember the words of Jesus, “The Truth will set you free!”