

LORD HAVE MERCY
DO NOT LOOK ON OUR SINS BUT ON THE FAITH OF YOUR CHURCH.

Fr. Mike
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Dear Parishioners,

I write to you this weekend about scandal, scandal in the Church. This is prompted by the recent news about the extensive abuse by priests which took place in the Pennsylvania dioceses during the past 70 years. I write in the hope that by reflecting on this tragedy, which is a source of scandal, shame and pain, we might come to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a member of the Church and how we can grow as Christ's disciples.

The Church' teaching is very clear. Sexual abuse of another person is a serious sin and a civil crime. When committed by a priest, deacon or other minister of the Church it is doubly tragic. It is a betrayal of a sacred trust.

Some Background:

The Archdiocese of Seattle first faced the tragic problem of sexual abuse in the mid 1980's as two cases of priest pedophilia were reported to the Archbishop. As a result of these painful circumstances, the Archdiocese of Seattle turned to the professional community for guidance and counsel. In cooperation with specialists in this area and community advisors the Archbishop ordered the systematic examination of all personnel files. In addition, he asked the State Attorney General's Office to review all problem files from a legal perspective.

From that time to now, five core values have governed the development and application of policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse and misconduct on the part of clergy and lay ministers in the Archdiocese.

1. The creation of faith communities where children, youth and young adults can live and learn in safe and positive environments;
2. Pastoral care and counseling for victims of sexual abuse and misconduct;
3. Diligent canonical and legal due process for the accused and all concerned parties;
4. Full cooperation with law enforcement agencies;
5. Strong emphasis upon prevention and education for all who serve the Church community.

These policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated.

All persons working in our parishes and faith communities and as well as volunteers who have unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults are required to undergo background checks and participate in an safe environment training programs.

A sexual abuse prevention program has been in place since 2007 for students in our Catholic Schools. There is hope that it may be a model for students in public schools.

Before anyone is accepted as a seminarian (one studying to be a priest) they are carefully screened. Every effort is made so that those ordained as priests are well balanced physically, emotionally, socially, psycho-sexually and spiritually.

In the process of providing some compensation for victims no Archdiocesan Catholic Appeal funds or other specified funds have been or will be used.

Our Archdiocesan efforts in dealing with abuse cases and in preventing further abuse have been consistently recognized as being among the best in the country. Hopefully the Church in other countries can learn from our experience.

Some Important Points:

Spirituality and sexuality are two sides of the same coin. They are expressions of the energy that drive us toward union. The basic energy in the universe is love. Spirituality has to do with directing or channeling one's love. The spiritual journey of a Christian is that of turning from self-love to love of God, neighbor and creation as Christ taught. Sexuality has to do with our maleness or femaleness. Genital sex is but one expression, although a very significant one, of sexuality. Both spiritual energy and sexual energy are very powerful and need to be properly channeled, Otherwise like a river overflowing its banks they can each be very destructive.

Spiritual energy which is not properly focused, usually through a religion, becomes a cult. Cults often end up being destructive. Think of Jim Jones or Waco.

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Sexual energy is focused through the sacredness of marriage. When marriage is not valued, sexual energy ends up being destructive as we have witnessed in the lives of some politicians, celebrities and sports figures.

- + When both spiritual and sexual energy lead to sexual abuse, especially by clergy, the results are truly devastating. It should never happen.

Keeping Focused:

- + Unfortunately this is not the first nor will it be the last scandal in the Church. We might well take to heart the words of St. Frances de Sales, ***“While those who give scandal are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder, those who allow scandals to destroy their faith are guilty of spiritual suicide.”***

- + It is especially in times of great sorrow that we need to turn to Jesus who is the Lord. The Church, which is the community of his disciples, does not exist on its own. It is the Body of Christ.

- + Peter represents the Church. Jesus called Peter both Satan and Rock. At times the Church has turned people away from Christ. But even in its worst moments it serves as a rock for people to cling to Christ. Like Peter, the Church is forever learning what it means to be a faith filled disciple who follows the Lord.

- + One image of the Church is the “bark or boat of Peter”. Peter himself is an icon of the Church. He denied Christ but ultimately responded by saying, “Lord you know everything, you know that I love you.” (Jn 21:17)

Like Peter, some individuals and the Church, as an institution, has from time to time, failed to live as Christ taught, but Christ, the head of the Church, promised that “the gates of the netherworld {hell} would not overcome it”. (Matt 16:18) Like Peter the Church in its members are always in need of repentance and renewal.

- + The Church is both holy and sinful in its members, that is to say, you and I . Because we ourselves are sinners, we can have compassion on our brothers and sisters who sin. Our hope of becoming holy rests in the Lord’s great mercy and his promise to heal us.

- + Deacons, Priests and Bishops serve us by being signs and catalyst for our growth as Christ’s disciples. Their words and actions can either prompt us to draw us closer to Christ or drive us away. This is particularly true of priests since most people interact with priests in the context of the parish.

When deacons, priests or bishops sin and fail to serve Church as they should, it is a tragedy and a source of scandal, shame and pain.

Sexual abuse is one of these tragedies. While it is true to say that most priests are faithful to their vow of celibacy, which is meant to free them to serve the Church wholeheartedly, it is very clear that the actions of a relative few cause great pain to their victims, cast suspicion on all priests and bring shame to those who embrace the Catholic religion.

- + There is a reason for everything that happens, but for some things there are no excuses. In the early 1980’s the United States Bishops were made aware that acts of pedophilia were not just failures of the will but were a sickness that required special and life long treatment. No reason is sufficient for assigning or leaving a priest or a minister who is a pedophile in any assignment.

- + We, as individuals, a society and the Church, have yet to reach a full understanding of and a living out of our sexuality as one of God’s most precious gifts. As men and women we must continue to grow so that we might mature as life-giving and self-giving lovers.

- + In the past there have been times of great confusion and darkness in the Church. At these times God raised up great saints to overcome, by their holy lives, the confusion and darkness. The scandal of priest pedophilia has caused confusion and darkness in the Church. Such times call for HOLINESS on the part of all, not just priests. Pray that this time of scandal will give all of us a greater desire to serve our Lord more fully and faithfully.

Any one who has knowledge of Sexual Abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy, archdiocesan employee or volunteer is urged to call the archdiocesan hot line at 1-800-446-7762