

## **Father Christopher Roberts' September 16, 2018 Homily**

I have promised a homily about what to do in face of the scandal of bad shepherds in the Church. These bad shepherds are people who, as Saint James described in the second reading, have faith but lack good works.

I propose to do the following:

**firstly**, to look at the scope of the problem,

**secondly**, to give reasons why we should persevere in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic faith and

**thirdly** and finally to propose some things each one of us can do to be part of the solution.

### ***The Scope of the Problem***

When a church official does not protect the flock by removing a church employee from ministry when there is sexual abuse of a minor, this action enables more abuse. The most appalling aspect of the scandal that we face is a failure of bishops to protect their flock from wolves in sheep's clothing. Even though they themselves did not rape children, my opinion is that bishops and their close collaborators could have probably stopped a majority of these crimes if they had acted decisively as soon as they learned of them.

**How many priests are we talking about being criminal child sexual abusers?** According to the John Jay College of Criminal Justice study, 5.6% of priests ordained between 1950 and 2002 have been accused of sexually abusing a minor.

Since 2002, the Dallas Charter has dictated a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse of minors. Any priest, church employee or volunteer with a credible accusation of this kind of child abuse is immediately removed from ministry. The first person representing the Church who receives the report must inform law enforcement. Law enforcement carries on an impartial investigation and uncovers the truth. If the charge is found likely to be true, this is the end of a priest, church employee or volunteer's involvement in ministry *for life*. The charter also mandated a range of other protocols for those involved with ministering to minors.

The Dallas Charter was a huge step forward and promoted the safety of children in the Church. Unfortunately, the charter does not make provision for how to handle bad bishops who do not enforce it other than hoping that the Pope steps in. *We should encourage our bishop to lobby for an effective mechanism for removing bishops who fail to protect children.*

**What about the Diocese of Lafayette?** When I was fourteen, the *Indianapolis Star* ran an exposé on priests in our diocese who had sexually abused children. It identified five priests ordained for the diocese and one priest from a religious order who had abused children while ministering here. At the time of the series' publication in 1994, all of these offenders had been removed from ministry. Since 1994, a priest from this diocese was removed from the priesthood due to the discovery of an instance of sexual abuse of a minor. I believe that the removal happened six or seven years ago. Bishop Doherty has promised to publish all previously published information in the coming weeks.

In conversations with parishioners, I have learned of one priest from the *Indianapolis Star* exposé who has been assigned to Saint Paul, Ron Voss. He has been expelled from the priesthood. As for other rumors, until I hear a specific allegation, I am unable to report anything else.

The light of truth dispels evil and helps goodness to grow. While painful, the revelation of corruption in the Church, even the hierarchy, is a gift from God.

### ***Why Remain Catholic?***

At this point one cannot help but ask the question, “*Why not leave the Church?*” I can speak most convincingly for myself. I admit that I did have some disillusionment with the priesthood and the Church that contributed to me stepping away from ministry for a year in 2010. It took about six months of working in the world to realize that the world outside the Church has more than its share of corruption, which only reinforced the experience I had in my college days.

More to the point, I am still a Catholic priest because I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who suffered for my sins, died and rose on the third day. Being God in the flesh, our Lord was not lying when He said that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. As a student of history, I believe that the preponderance of the evidence points to the Catholic Church being the Church that Jesus founded in the first century in Palestine. I simply cannot believe that forms of Christianity that only emerged in northern Europe or the United States in the last 500 years could possibly be the Church that Christ began when he chose the twelve apostles almost 2000 years ago.

Most importantly, I am still Catholic and a priest because I believe that practicing Catholicism has brought me closer to Jesus. I have observed the same thing in the lives of those Catholics I know who really seek to put their faith into practice. Suffering and death are facts of life inside or outside the Church. My experience is that facing suffering and death close to Jesus in the sacraments brings great joy, even in the midst of sadness. I am profoundly grateful that God has called me able to be a minister of that joy.

### ***What Can We Do?***

Finally, how can we be a part of the solution to this horrible crisis in the Church? I want to propose natural and supernatural means. When it comes to natural solutions, we Catholics in Grant County can do these three things:

- (1) Be ever vigilant to make sure that an adult is never alone with a minor on Church property or at a parish event. Period. Correct those who violate this protocol, even if you are certain that there is nothing improper going on. Report anything that seems the least bit suspicious soberly and accurately. As I cannot see everything on campus, I need your help.
- (2) If you become aware of sexual abuse of a minor, report it to the police immediately no matter where or when it happened. The police have the resources and training to find the truth. Failing to report abuse usually enables further abuse.
- (3) Encourage Bishop Doherty, who became the chairman of the US bishops’ committee on child protection about a year ago, to advocate for an effective way to remove bad bishops.

We close by considering the supernatural means that we can use to fight this evil. Above all, our battle is with flesh and blood, but the devil and his associates. We need spiritual weapons.

In 1973 in Akita, Japan, Sr. Agnes Sasagawa heard a voice coming from the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the chapel where she was praying. On the same day, a few of the sisters noticed drops of blood flowing from the statue's right hand. Two years later, the statue of the Blessed Virgin began to weep. It continued to weep at intervals for the next 6 years and eight months. This apparition received approval from the local bishop.

This is some of what the Mother of God said to Sr. Agnes when she spoke to her:

***"The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church in such a way that one will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres...churches and altars sacked; the Church will be full of those who accept compromises and the demon will press many priests and consecrated souls to leave the service of the Lord."***

Mary recommended daily recitation of the rosary in reparation for the sins of the leaders in the Church and for the purification of the Church. We must never underestimate the power of this prayer to defeat evil.

Faith without works will not save us. Together we have the natural and supernatural tools necessary for the task. It is for us to put them into practice. The future of Christ's Church and our own salvation depend on it.