CLERGY ABUSE

It is important for me to comment on the clergy sexual abuse of children that the Attorney General of Pennsylvania revealed about two weeks ago following a grand jury investigation. The report chronicles the abuse of some 1000 minors by about 300 priests in six Pennsylvania dioceses going back to the 1940s.

This abuse is something that priests feel anger and revulsion about. That our fellow clergy have done these things is a daily burden of shame and guilt by association for me and others in this vocation. I personally feel a deep sadness and disgust. But how this crisis is affecting me and my brother clergy is not so important right now. At this time the church needs to focus solely on care for the victims and on coming clean once and for all about all the priests and lay leaders who have committed these crimes and about all the bishops and others who have covered them up.

Sunlight is the only way we can deal with this situation and cleanse the church. Until our religious leaders admit all of it, Catholics and others will rightly be enraged – and the church will not be whole. Such leaders need to be forthright about how many priests and other church ministers did these acts and how many bishops and their associates covered all this up in America – and in the whole world if necessary. This outrageous wrong against children will not go away and should not be over until we have exposed everything and everyone. And we must always remember with unspeakable sadness that it will never be over for the victims for as long as they live. I am reminded of the movie “Spotlight” (2015) which was about some Boston Globe journalists who uncovered the clergy abuse scandal in Boston in the early 2000s. Let the Spotlight shine again for as long as it takes!

The sins/crimes that priests committed, as horrible as they were, pale by comparison to the cover up that bishops and other members of the hierarchy have engaged in. Moving priest-abusers from parish to parish in the name of “protecting” the church is an abomination to the Lord. Jesus did not “protect” his Body; he offered it to be battered and executed to save us. The church is the Body of Christ and the Spouse of Christ and she is called to follow Jesus’ sacrificial example – especially to protect innocent children instead of selfishly and greedily “protecting” herself.
Some bishops and other catholic leaders want to say that these crimes got a lot worse because of the “moral laxity” of the 1960s and ‘70s. This is a copout. The Pennsylvania investigation shows these crimes go back to the 1940s at least. The truth is that these abuses go way back in history. There are books and articles written about sexual abuse of minors in every age and in every area and institution of society. It will not do to attempt to scapegoat a particular time. Every time has some “moral laxity.” We just need to be open and honest about such abuse whenever and wherever it happened.

The most important item on the agenda of Pope Francis and Catholic bishops today is to announce a credible process that will finally hold bishops truly accountable for their own sins/crimes of abuse and cover up. There has been a double standard for too long – priests and deacons and lay ministers have been held to one standard and bishops have been held to another, lower standard. This is patently unjust. And more importantly, it continues to hurt children.

I personally believe it is also critical that the process for selecting bishops become more transparent. A super secretive process, such as we have now, makes it easier to hide abuse and to look the other way when abuse is suspected.

I ask that all St. Paul parishioners join me in praying for the church and her priests daily. I also ask that we pray especially for the victims of sexual abuse in the church and that no one else will be hurt in this terrible way. It is good as well to ask God to help the abusers to admit what they have done and to be truly sorry and to get the help they need.

I love the church the People of God.

In the Christ Child,

Fr. Charlie