

The Fire

The Feast of the Assumption of Mary was MEANT to be a cause of celebration and great joy for the Church. It is the Feast where we CELEBRATE the TRIUMPH of Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension OVER DEATH ITSELF; this feast was meant to be a FORESHADOWING of our future destiny ASSUMED into heaven *where the Queen of Heaven awaits us*.

Yet on the eve before the 15th of August 2018, the evening before we celebrated the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, the SINS of the Church **were put on full display all over the media, all over the world**. The day when we were supposed to celebrate the triumph of grace over sin, the ***putrid stain of sin*** was PLASTERED all over the face of the Church.

A grand jury report was just released on August 14: an 884 page document detailing the horrendous sexual abuse that over 1000 victims endured at the hands of potentially 300 priests! It broke my heart to hear that HUNDREDS and HUNDREDS of children and teenagers suffered at the hands of *those who were supposed to be* **MINISTERS OF GOD**, and some of the crimes are SO HEINOUS that I dare not even utter them. This scandal is different because it is not just one priest abusing children—***although one abuse is one too many***—this scandal involved coordinated networks of priests over decades systematically abusing children.

And now a fire has erupted from within the Church and now this building is consumed by its flames.

Today we read in the Gospel, "Let the children come to me", and the world looks at us and says, "How DARE you even READ that after what has just happened! We have let the little children come to the Church and ***what have you done with them?!'***"

Maybe you feel like this too. Maybe you feel *hurt, betrayed, confused or even angry* because of the Church. You are RIGHT to *feel hurt and anger* because when *innocence is stolen from a child*, when the wounds are SO DEEP that *the victims cannot even express love to their spouses or their children* DECADES later, ***when even the very name of God provokes years of trauma for victims***, we ALL should be ANGRY because a GRAVE EVIL has been committed and those who committed or enabled these crimes should be **brought to justice and removed from ministry forever**.

But our hurt and our anger SHOULD NOT be directed into PURE RAGE or *imprudent actions* but our emotions SHOULD BE *directed into fervent prayers, penance and healing for these victims* and CONCRETE steps to protect children and to hold PRIESTS, and EVEN BISHOPS accountable. Indeed, the USCCB has just issued a statement on August 16, 2018, just a day after, outlining concrete steps forward to investigate the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick and by providing confidential channels for people to issue complaints against bishops and priests.

Surely this will lead to some disturbing findings. Changes will be needed. Priests and bishops will have to be removed. Familiar structures will have to change and ***it will ALL feel like the Church is burning down.*** But what are YOU going to do about it? What are WE going to do about it?

Fr. John was just about to enter seminary in 2001 when the massive scandals in Boston broke out. It rocked his world and he vowed never to be a priest like that. Fast forward to 2005 in Rome and he is now a seminarian living with a bunch of priests who seemed like the lackluster priest he did not want to be—they were wearing khakis and polo shirts and not their clerics. But on the last day of the semester during lunch, one of these old priests were invited to address Fr. John and his colleagues and he said these words that would be forever etched in his mind:

“When all of us old guys entered the priesthood, *we were RESPECTED* by our families, our parishes, our communities, etc. *We were THANKED and everyone thought really HIGHLY of us* when we headed off to the seminary. The Church was, in America at least, in her heyday.

But you guys *here today* entered the seminary in the midst of the ***WORST SCANDAL in the history of the priesthood.*** And here he raised his voice, ***“The Church is on FIRE RIGHT NOW with the scandals and sins and you guys RAN INTO the burning building.*** You guys said ***“I want to be a priest”*** DESPITE people looking at you like you’d hurt children ***YOU RAN INTO THE BURNING BUILDING*** and I want to say thanks to you. My fellow priests who’ve been with you these past few months, we’ve all been talking about how much we admire you guys, and we talk all the time about how the Church looks like it is in great hands. God bless!”

For the past two decades since 2001, many HEROIC priests and seminarians *have ran back into this burning building*, have ***led their flock back into that FIERY INFERNO*** because they saw that the Church *in fact had ALWAYS been burning*; the Church had always been burning because it was issued forth from that Most Sacred Heart, that most Sacred Furnace of Love which is now burning up and purifying all that is impure and all that is corrupt ***FOR OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE*** (Heb 12:29)! This is so that the obstacles which prevented the children from coming to Christ will now be ***reduced to ashes*** so that Jesus can say ONCE AGAIN to his BELOVED ONES: ***“Let the children come to me and do not prevent them! For the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”***

This is Jesus’ Church and he will never abandon his Church. Despite the sinfulness of her members in the Church, his Sacred Heart is still burning.

So I am going to run back into this burning building—what will you do?