

Homily for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary TimeSeptember 15 – 16th 2018***Let justice roll down like waters,******Introduction:***

Perhaps you remember the cartoon strip, Calvin and Hobbes. Calvin is a little boy with an overactive imagination and a stuffed tiger, Hobbes, who comes to life as his imaginary friend. In one cartoon strip, Calvin turns to his friend Hobbes and says, "I feel bad I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did that." Hobbes replies, "Maybe you should apologize to her." Calvin thinks about it for a moment and then responds, "I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution."

I use this light and humorous story as a way to enter into a discussion with you today about a story that is anything but light and humorous. That is, the most recent allegations of sexual abuse in the Church, especially as it pertains to the decade's long sodomy of Theodore McCarrick. He is reported to have used seminarians and young priests for his own disordered pleasure. Then there is the Pennsylvania Report, where some 300 priests in six dioceses committed the crimes of sexual, emotional, psychological and spiritual assault against children over a period of 70 years.

The crimes themselves are heinous – but what makes it all the more painful, resulting in frustration, anger, confusion and bewilderment from the Catholic Faithful and the watching world, is how these crimes were covered up. Like Calvin, some in positions of Episcopal leadership were looking for a less obvious solution than the one most needed. That was to remove from office and allow for the due process of law to take effect for those priests suspected of such crimes. Pope Francis in addressing the cover-up wrote in his letter of August 20th:

The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced. . But their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence it, or sought even to resolve it by decisions that increased its gravity by falling into complicity.

The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side he stands¹

What is the cry the Lord has heard? The cry for true justice. Amos, writing in 8th Century BC addressed the corruption of his day by declaring:

***But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream²***

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. (1993). (Am 5:24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

1. *Define Justice:*

So what is justice?

St. Thomas Aquinas defined justice as “The perpetual, constant will to give everyone what is due him.” To God we give the worship which is due Him as our Creator, Lord and Father. To our neighbour, we owe respect for his or her rights, taking into account our various obligations to them. There is a clear expression of justice in our reading from James where he understands faith in Jesus Christ results in the exercise of justice towards the poor. Faith said St. James without the work of true justice is dead.

St Catherine of Sienna said of Justice:

“O Justice, thou art the precious pearl which makes the soul shine brightly; thou givest peace and light to creatures; thou keepest them in holy fear and dost unite their hearts.”³

What does Catherine mean by Holy Fear? This is what the Bible refers to as the “fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of Wisdom. “ People who live in fear of God are not terrified of him but understand something King David famously said in Psalm 139:

***O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.***⁴

When we live justly our lives do shine like a precious jewel because we are living attentive to the Lord’s just ways in all our doings.

2. *The Injustice of the Sex Abuse Scandal:*

What happens though when injustice rears its ugly head and influence? Listen again to St. Catherine:

“If thy light failest, we are immediately plunged into confusion and surrounded by the darkness of injustice”⁵

I think this an apt expression of the injustice of the McCarrick revelations and Grand Jury Report. Perhaps this captures how some of you were and are feeling. Plunged into confusion because those who had taken vows to live as representing the person of Jesus were in league with him who is the prince of this world.

³ Divine Intimacy Page 807

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ps 139:1–3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵ Divine Intimacy Page 807

Jesus' words spoken to Peter, are also spoken today to those in the Church who perpetrated these acts and those who covered them up:

Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.

Men who were called to exemplify the one who carried his Cross to Calvary, instead exemplified those who killed Jesus: the Jewish Religious Establishment.

Let me explain what I mean. The Psalm we read today was one of the Psalms Jesus read at the Last Supper just before he entered into his Passion.

***³The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.***

Jesus suffered distress and anguish because of the injustice done to him by clergymen. For all of those who were subject to abuse in the Church this image is, I hope, an apt one. Living with the effects of the abuse are like the snares from which it is so hard to be freed. Distress, anguish and being surrounded by “the darkness of injustice”, to return to St. Catherine’s language.

Pope Francis addressed this injustice when he wrote in his letter:

Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike. Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated.⁶

3. How justice is being restored:

Here the Holy Father is speaking of the theme of restorative justice which brings me to our reading from Isaiah where it is said of the Servant of the Lord, Hundreds of years before he came this song anticipates Jesus.

***⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face***

⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html

from insult and spitting.

The Lord Jesus subjected himself to such abuse voluntarily and so identifies with all those who involuntarily have in their bodies and souls experienced such horror. Part of the restorative dimension of Justice is to clearly affirm Jesus does not stand in solidarity with those responsible for and covered up such crimes but with the crimes' victims.

With this in mind listen to the second part of our Isaiah reading:

*he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.*

It is this theme of vindication that we need to highlight as we stand in solidarity with those who have suffered such terrible abuse. I pray that at St. Peter's we will continue to do all that is necessary to make this a community where people experience the Lord's help. We will not countenance the evils inherent in the sordid history of clerical sexual abuse of minors or those under the care of the Church as seminarians and those being formed for the Religious Life.

We are living at a time where the obvious solution of fully owning up to the abuse is thankfully happening in the Church. The Alberta Bishop's in their letter from August 17th affirmed this when they wrote to us:

We all have a sacred trust to protect those who are vulnerable, particularly children, and to stand up and speak when we witness that trust betrayed. We have made Safe Environments and Abuse Prevention programs a high priority in our dioceses. We cannot run or hide from instances of abuse and harm, and we have no desire to do so. We confront these situations with the Gospel principles of truth, justice, repentance and healing.

May we, with Amos, pray and work so that justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an everlasting stream.

