

Homily for the Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter

Acts 20:28–38
 Psalm 68:29–30, 33–36b
 John 17:11b–19

I am sure we have all had the experience either directly or indirectly when the question has been asked:

How can you in all good conscience be a Roman Catholic when you see all of the corruption that is in the Church, especially when it pertains to child sexual abuse and bishops found with child pornography on their computers? How can you countenance the kind of cover-up exposed in movies like Spotlight? Doesn't this just prove the Catholic Church is rotten through and through?

Such criticisms can be unsettling and result in our losing our voice because we have to acknowledge that such breaches of trust are heinous due to their effects, not only on the victims, but on how they compromise and undermined the integrity and witness of the Church. What do we say in light of such blatant evil? Our readings help answer this question by making to points. It is important

1. To acknowledge how evil influences the Church and always has from her beginnings.
2. To do everything that lies within our influence to be people of integrity and deepening sanctity.

We need to honestly admit that the Church is prone to the influence of evil. Listen to how St. Paul puts it:

²⁹ I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

Paul is speaking here to the Church in Ephesus. As the first generation of the Church developed Ephesus became the centre for the seven Churches in what is modern day Turkey. These seven churches are listed in Revelation 2 and 3. In a church of such importance St. Paul speaks of savage wolves who will come among them. Even, says St. Paul, some who are part of the Ephesian Church leadership will be influenced by the infiltrators' diabolical words and actions. People will be enticed to follow them. Such is the manipulative nature of evil when at work in the Church. Paul could see this coming and so for three years he warned them about the encroaching evil, even with tears.

Because of the prevalence of evil we need to be alert by identifying evil when we see it and to also call those in leadership to holiness of life. Listen to who St. Paul expresses this call:

²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Those who have been entrusted with the ordained leadership of this and every parish have to keep watch over themselves. This requires the kind of honesty to look carefully at our interior life. To make sure we are under spiritual direction and are taking seriously the sacrament of Confession in our own lives. It is also to remember that the flock that is St. Peter's is not ours but Christ Jesus'. What a difference it makes when we are aware that you are precious to the Lord and have been obtained with the blood of Jesus. Priests who understand who they are and understand who God's people are will exercise their calling with a humble recognition of how great is this trust.

When such trust and responsibility is rightly exercised then the local church will be a community where our Lord's Prayer can be enacted more fully:

¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

When the Church has godly leaders who desire to impart the true and living word to the faithful then the Church, while still in the world, can be kept from the evil ones' grasp. As well, such communities will be fellowships where people are sanctified in the truth because God's word can be free to work in the lives of people because there is an environment of trust and true pastoral care.

May you pray for the ordained leadership of St. Peter's and the larger Church so that we can be alert to how deceptive and beguiling evil can be while guarding our lives and the lives and the Lord's people so that together we can grow in sanctity befitting of the people of God be they in Ephesus or here in Calgary.