

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



The Temptation of Christ

My heart is broken as I write these words to you. Last night (Tuesday, August 14), I began reading the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, detailing child sexual abuse by priests in six dioceses in Pennsylvania. Over 1,000 victims; 300 priest offenders; over a 70-year time frame. It also details the cover up by bishops, priests, and administrative officials. So far in my reading, I have not seen of anyone calling the police. Yes, it was a different time and place. But crime has always been crime. All of this is difficult to take in and process. But I will share with you my initial thoughts.

This ongoing story has been a part of my priesthood since my ordination in 2002, when the revelations of abuse in Boston came to light. Then, when I served as vicar for clergy, I was exposed to the abuse crisis in our own Archdiocese. I read the files. I served on our Archdiocesan Review Board. Our office worked with and monitored priests on prayer and penance. Others, especially Archbishop Brunett and Archbishop Sartain, met with victims. I am happy to have played a small part in the new formation, trainings (for priests and lay people alike), policies, and procedures that make our current local church a model for providing a safe environment in our parishes and schools.

But I have never seen anything like this new report from Pennsylvania. It is sinful, diabolical, and horrendous. The report itself begins with these words: "We, the members of this grand jury, need you to hear this." I couldn't agree more. Whether you take a stab at reading the report, or read a story in the media about the report, it does need to be heard. Whatever is in the darkness, must be brought to the light. That in itself is a first step in going forward. As painful as it is, we all must hear and take heed of the past. But I also think that our first reactions must come from a place of clarity and conviction; from a place of faith and hope.

Above is a painting of the temptation of Christ by the devil. After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was led into the desert and tempted by Satan. The enemy of our human nature whispered into our Lord's ear the

same words he whispers to us when we are confronted with things like this grand jury report: "Give up! It's not worth it! Follow me instead!"

In light of the terrible news of sexual abuse of children by clergy; the very ones who were entrusted with the faith and education of God's little ones, we can be tempted to just give up on the whole thing. The enemy tells us to give up on a rotten, sinful, and ruined Church; he tells us to give up on Christ's priests, bishops, religious and lay leaders. He tells us to give up on each other and the rest of humanity's lost. He tells us they'll be better off without Christ and His Church.

For us, we must muster the faith and hope that is given to us in our Baptism to respond to Satan with our own conviction: "To hell with you, Satan. In Jesus' name be gone!" Why do I say this? Because each and every one of us is needed now more than ever. Each of us, in our own way and calling, is needed to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Having heard all the sins and all the brokenness, we must be open to how God will use us to bring His healing grace to all who need it.

Who needs that grace? Who needs us? Well, first, the victims of all sexual abuse need us. They need to know that they are known. They need to know that we love them and will listen to their stories. They need to know we are sorry. They need to know that we are here for them and will help them to open their hearts and lives to healing and wholeness. Where and who are they? They are everywhere. They are your friends, neighbors, and family members. They might be you. Who did this to them? Offenders include priests, bishops, religious sisters and brothers, and lay employees as well. Offenders also include family members, neighbors, teachers, coaches etc. The problem is widespread. The victims need us. They need us to listen and hear them. And they need our faith and hope that Jesus heals all wounds.

Who else needs us? The vast majority of good, holy priests, bishops and religious who have been called and who have given their lives for the good news of the gospel. They need to know that their calling is right, good, noble and needed for the salvation of the world. That's what the Church is ultimately about. And the institutional Church needs us. It needs us to call for and lead reform. The Church needs her members, clergy, religious and lay alike, to be renewed in their commitment to healing the wounds created long ago. And all God's people need us. The faithful and unfaithful; the lost, fallen away, the hopeless and forgotten. Everyone for whom Christ died on the cross needs us to make the message of salvation known, accepted and received. As Saint Catherine of Sienna would say, now is the time to rebuke the enemy and his minions, and to pray for courage and strength; to pray in reparation and penance for the sins of the past and for guidance going forward toward a future full of hope. Friends, don't give up. We are needed!

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