

Fr. Fred's Homily for August 25 & 26

It is with deep sadness that I stand here to give this homily. It is with deep shame and great anger that I am compelled to share my thoughts and feelings over the recent news items about the Church, the bishops and clergy, and the abuse and mistreatment of people that has been allowed to continue for decades.

Perhaps you, too, come here today with feelings of anger, of sadness, of betrayal, of abandonment and even of disgust. A good priest friend of mine said just the other day that he's "had it" and is ready to give it all up! I have to say those thoughts have crossed my mind as well. Maybe they've even crossed your mind, too.

My prayer over this matter has led me to a new and even stronger realization of the presence of Evil in our world, in our lives, AND in our Church. The Evil One will stop at NOTHING in order to destroy the Church. To use the weakness of some members of the clergy is an ideal way to break the trust of faith-filled Christians, and to further weaken the people weakens the whole Church.

But we come here, believing that Jesus died and rose again, conquering sin and death and winning the gift of salvation for us all. Jesus conquered evil. Evil has no power unless we give it him.

In his letter of August 20 Pope Francis wrote:

In recent days, a report was made public which detailed the experiences of at least a thousand survivors, victims of sexual abuse, the abuse of power and of conscience at the hands of priests over a period of approximately seventy years. Even though... most of these cases belong to the past, nonetheless as time goes on we have come to know the pain of many of the victims. We have realized that these wounds never disappear and that they require us forcefully to condemn these atrocities and join forces in uprooting this culture of death; these wounds never go away. 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... by decisions that increased its gravity by falling into complicity. The Lord heard that cry and once again showed us on which side He stands. Mary's song is not mistaken and continues quietly to echo throughout history. For the Lord remembers the promise He made to our fathers: "He has scattered the proud in their conceit; He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (Lk 1:51-53). We feel shame when we realize that our style of life has denied, and continues to deny, the words we recite.

With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives. We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them. I make my own the words of the then Cardinal Ratzinger when, during the Way of the Cross composed for Good Friday 2005, he identified with the cry of pain of so many victims and exclaimed: "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to Christ! How much pride, how much self-complacency! Christ's betrayal by His disciples, their unworthy reception of His body and blood, is certainly the greatest suffering endured by the Redeemer; it pierces His heart. We can only call to Him from the depths of our hearts: Lord, save us!"

... "If one member suffers, all suffer together", said Saint Paul. By an attitude of prayer and penance, we will become attuned as individuals and as a community to this exhortation, so that we may grow in the gift of compassion, in justice, prevention and reparation. Mary chose to stand at the foot of her Son's cross. She did so unhesitatingly, standing firmly by Jesus' side. In this way, she reveals the way she lived her entire life. When we experience the desolation caused by these ecclesial wounds, we will do well, with Mary, "to insist more upon prayer", seeking to grow all the more in love and fidelity.

May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives a message to His followers which many find difficult to accept. Many of them leave His company because of it. Jesus then asks the apostles what they will do, and Peter responds, "Lord, where else would we go. YOU HAVE THE WORDS FOR EVERLASTING LIFE."

May each one of us seek the hope and promise of life that can only come from Jesus. May we then bring that message to each and every member of the Church as we all struggle to survive. May we seek the truth, may we follow His way, and may we experience new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.