

21st Sunday – B

CtR

26 Aug. 2018

My sincere thanks to all of you reached out with prayers and condolences at the passing of my mother 10 days ago. My family and I are truly grateful for the kind words of sympathy, emails, and cards. My mother had a full life of 94 years, and her death was peaceful and prayerful, with my sister, brother, and I by her side praying as she passed from this life to the next. Couldn't ask for much more than that. She'll always be in my heart, where my dad has been for the last 18 years since his death. And don't worry – I have lots more stories of her that you will undoubtedly hear in a future homily. She is the gift that keeps on giving, in death as in life!

I also want to acknowledge that this is the first anniversary of Hurricane Harvey that inundated our city with more than 51 inches of rain and caused such widespread destruction. While we in this area of Cypress and northwest Houston were largely spared as compared to other areas, we still had a number of our parishioners who were flooded. And as devastating as it was to experience, it's also good for us to remember the way the community came together in the days and weeks afterwards.

Like many churches and community organizations, we organized a clean-up outreach ministry in those first few days after the rains stopped. Hundreds of you volunteered to muck out houses, tear out drywall and carpet, and help friends and strangers alike in their time of need. That's worth celebrating and remembering what is

possible when we put aside differences and look to help any and all in need. May that spirit forever be in our hearts and upon our hands.

Last week I asked you to bring your cell phone to Mass this week, but I didn't tell you why. I realize that most of us do that anyway, but if you made a special effort to bring it today, I want to apologize to you because it turns out you are not going to need them today as I had planned. We've got a fun initiative I think you'll like to use for them – hint, it's a way to grow engage the faith on a deeper level – but I'm going to delay rolling it out until mid-September. I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to pull a “switcheroo” on you, but that is something that can wait a few weeks. Instead I want to address something more serious that can't wait.

I want to speak to you about the crisis that is impacting the Church and the people of God at this time. You've undoubtedly heard of the credible accusations against Archbishop McCarrick, the former Cardinal of Washington, D.C., along with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's report released last week. If you haven't, I encourage you to read up on it. It's ugly, but it's important we know the evil we are facing.

Make no mistake, it is an evil and it's in the Church. It's criminal and it's sinful. The abuse at the hands of some Church leaders is reprehensible. Many of you have shared your concern and disgust, and believe me, I am with you. I'm appalled at what was done, and what was not done to protect them most innocent. I don't know how anyone of good conscience can think otherwise. The leadership of the Church failed

tremendously. Not all, of course, but one is too many, and the action and subsequent inaction of some priests and bishops of the Church has done great harm to the Body of the Christ. It matters not that most of the malfeasance was done long ago. It was wrong then, and it's wrong now, and the cover-up and secrecy behind it only makes it worse.

What can we do in response? First, foremost, and always we must accompany in both prayer and action those who were harmed, and their family members, too, because the repercussion of such abuse have ripple effects over several generations. We must stand with them and see that those who permitted such actions are held responsible. Pray for those who have suffered so much. Pray for those who have done the harm, or those who looked the other way, that they may see the error their ways and amend their life. Pray for our society where so much abuse takes place in homes, schools, and offices. Sadly, the Church is not alone in being a place where such harm has been done. It's awful wherever it takes place, but when those entrusted with the care of souls carry out such action, it makes it all the more disgusting.

Beyond the prayers, however, we as a people of God, the Body of Christ, the Church, must be willing to take action as well. We must hold accountable the leadership of the Church, demand action and real solutions, and a greater openness in the Church where for far too long the buck has been passed behind closed doors. What has been in darkness must be exposed to the bright light of God's truth.

I had a frank discussion about this with Cardinal DiNardo two weeks ago when he was here for the dedication of the RAC. He is equally dismayed and disgusted by this. As President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, he is in a unique position to affect change, and I believe he will do so. It will not come easy. When you're dealing with 450+ active and retired bishops, plus Rome, Canon Law, and civil law, it is a monumental task. Let us pray for him, but – and he says this, too – hold him and the other bishops accountable. We want this to change, once and for all. The efforts of too many good bishops, priests, and people of God have been harmed by the crimes of a few. The Church of God must do better. It will take time, of course, and careful oversight by outside partners to walk the journey with the bishops, but we must insist that it begin now.

I've included one of his statements in this week's bulletin, and we other statements, including the latest from Pope Francis, available on our website. I don't know about you, however, but while I appreciate them, I'm tired of all the words. Talk is cheap. Prayer and action – ora et labora – is all that will bring us closer to God and purify the Church. In a sense, the time is now to echo the words of Peter in today's Gospel, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life." Christ's words are life. May those same words of life bring healing and hope to those who have been harmed, may they bring support to those whose faith has been shaken, and may they ultimately bring new life to the people of God and to the Church.