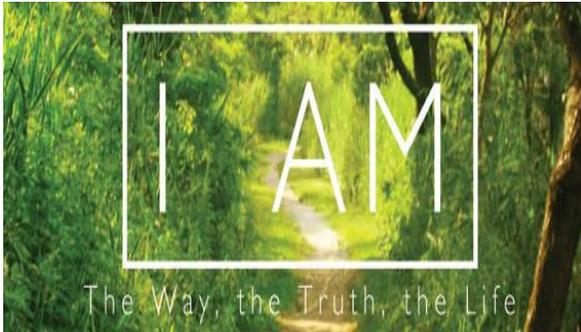




ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THIS SUNDAY August 26 & BEYOND”

“When the Church Leaders Aren’t Safe”



It was a very difficult moment for so many Roman Catholics as they began reading articles and blogs, hearing radio and TV newscasts, or hearing the news from friends, co-parish members, or even just overhearing conversations by people at the store, that a Pennsylvania investigation had identified more than 300 priests

who had sexually abused more than 1000 victims. The investigation was in regard to Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania, only. The shock, disgust, sorrow, and variety of other emotional responses was not limited to Pennsylvania Roman Catholics. For the Catholics in New York, New Jersey, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, as adjoining states, the alarm would have also been immense: too close, just too close for comfort. And then it would sink in with Catholics all over the United States, that with so many instances of abuse in one geographical location, the probability of the same in some measure taking place in their own far-removed diocese was high. And especially for those Catholics who had already lived through such allegations and confessions of abuse in their own diocese prior to this news, there would be one more difficult moment. Around the world, where such things had been revealed, even recently, the news of Pennsylvania would be like ripping open recent but potentially healing wounds.

The fall-out is not over. No Christian group or denomination is unaffected by sexual abuse, whether perpetrated by clergy or lay members. They know it, so when such a devastating report becomes public there is hardly any sigh of relief that somebody else got into the news instead of them. It would be more like prayers of despair, and hope for lesser revelation, while at the same time their OWN efforts to eradicate, if at all possible, such sin would be re-doubled. But the victims in those other groups and denominations will be (justly) emboldened to share their own grievances.

But the fall out will continue in other ways for awhile. For instance, members of Roman Catholic parishes (not just in Pennsylvania), and members of all kinds of Churches, will leave those parishes and congregations from fear, and probably some from just plain disgust. As well, friendships will be broken as people who are (usually) non-church members, for a variety of reasons, will cast aspersions, making it seem like their church-going friend is guilty of the same by association. I just heard this story from a friend who

is an ordained priest in my own denomination, the Episcopal Church, relating about an incident with his wife. A co-worker and friend of hers said, with apparently a tone of voice that had some serious attitude in it, “Your husband wears a collar; does he do that to little kids too?” End of friendship. Granted, this co-worker had some prior grievances and hurts of her own from a prior time in her life when she was a church-goer. But it certainly illustrates the continuing fallout of hurt, offense, projected offense, and now the hurt and pain of one more person, like collateral damage. But it couldn’t just be classified as “friendly fire.”

How will we ever sort through this and a whole string of events like this and other sinfulness throughout history? Let’s start with the reality: these kinds of devastating behaviors have happened before this moment, and they will happen in the years to come. I think the apostle John was on to something when, in the Book of Revelation, he says, “Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!” That’s not just “Calgon, take me away”, but “Let’s end this now. Let’s get that New Heaven and Earth promised for the end time.”

Barring that happening in the near future, we need to see a few things for perspective. We are stepping up to find avenues of healing for both the victims, and for the sickness and perversions of the perpetrators. The biggest perspective to hold is that the Church is made of people. There are a couple of maxims you may have heard (I shared these in a sermon recently so they are fresh in my mind) : “if it weren’t for people, the Church would be perfect”, and “If it weren’t for people, I would have no one to have to forgive.” This is not in any way said to minimize personal devastation and offense. It is said to remind us of the difference between the claims and promises of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and Jesus Christ himself. It is too simplistic, but this reflection has to be necessarily short, so it can be said that the difference is Jesus Christ is the Savior of the World, and the Church itself is NOT our salvation.

The perfection of God’s design for the world will not be fully realized until, in fact, Maranatha, Jesus DOES come again. Apostles betrayed Jesus. The Son of God was nailed to a tree, instigated by the very people he came to heal and raise up. The apostle Paul had to write letters to new Christian communities because they were failing to live up to their calling in Christ. So he admonished them, and then encouraged them to see what right fellowship looked like, how Christians were to CARE for each other, SUBMIT to each other in Christ, LOVE each other just as God loves them. In the Gospel reading for this Sunday, many who had been following Jesus “were offended” by the deep and true teaching of Jesus. And they left him (in so many ways!). It is not hard to imagine that some of those who left Jesus that day would be some of the same people who, in their own anger, would become the perpetrators, acting out in their abusive behavior by crying, “Crucify him.” What causes people, even people presumably “close” to Jesus, become those who act in such perverse ways?

What was just said is some clue, I believe, but we won't solve that in this reflection. So what do we do? We do what the Roman Catholic dioceses have been doing in Pennsylvania at least since 2002, which was to triple their efforts to vet aspiring leaders, demand accountability, to provide safe avenues for reporting, to promote prelates who will safeguard, and to educate parishes in learning how to be watchful. In other words, the entire Church, Body of Christ, as well as every business, corporation, school, non-profit, caring organizations, etc., take this as admonishment, and then make sure Paul's exhortations for how to do it right, loving our neighbor as our self, are implemented. And we pray hard to keep it that way.

Then we keep following Jesus Christ, and not our own will and fleshly desires. Since we are humans, this is easier said than done. But the point here is to recognize Jesus Christ for the claim he has made in salvation, that he is our healer. One of the Pennsylvania victims, unable at this point in time to initiate criminal proceedings himself (but was a witness in the 18-month investigation), allowed in an interview that since his physical and emotional demise, he has in fact found Jesus, and that has been his saving. He is no longer a member of the Roman Catholic church, but he has renewed his relationship with Jesus Christ.

"I now have a personal relationship with the Lord," he said. "Over time, my faith got stronger. The [Catholic] church was no longer an option, so I turned to being a very strong Christian on my own. I needed to, or I would have lost my family." And himself.

I believe, some of those who left Jesus on that day, perhaps many, came back to him as in their souls they realized that the only hope for the world – and their own personal world - was Jesus.

Lord, Prince of Peace, Savior of our souls, have mercy on us, your Church.

Fr. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector

Readings for this Sunday – The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-25 Psalm 34:15-22 Ephesians 5:21-33 John 6:60-69

CALENDAR

SUNDAY: The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

8:00a Low Mass (Church)

10:30a Solemn High Mass (Church)

—*The entrance to the church is on 6th Avenue*—

Note: Coffee Hour & Fellowship follow the Mass in the Parish Hall.

MONDAY: 7:00p (AA) Doctors' Group (Fireside Room)

TUESDAY: Noon Mass (St. Mary's Chapel)

FRIDAY: AA Meetings

8:00p Ladies' Group (Fireside Room)

8:15p Men's Group (Parish Hall)

An Anglo-Catholic Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego
www.allsaintschurch.org