

With the length of the Gospel I'll keep it a little shorter today. Last weekend Bart Schutz from The John Paul II Healing Center was here giving a workshop. One thing he said especially struck me. He was talking about the scandals in the Church -- the sexual abuse of minors and corruption among bishops, cardinals, and Popes. Bart is a revert to the Church, and so you might think he would be regretting that return given the scandals. But what he said was, "This is the greatest time in the Church's history to be a Catholic." Huh? He went on to explain, God is doing something historical. Yes, there is sin and evil within, and among, us. But it's finally being exposed. God is purifying us, and any time throughout history God has done that to His people it has resulted in deep pain, but then something new and powerful. And we're part of that, whether we wanted to be or not. The only thing we must decide is what we will do during this time of God's judgment.

I'm a historian, and so when I heard Bart speak that prophecy it made me think of something Winston Churchill said at the darkest time

of the Second World War. In a speech to the British Parliament on June 18, 1940 he laid out the situation to the nation after the route of the allied armies in France and the evacuation at Dunkirk. "The Battle of France is over," he said. "The Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization . . . if we fail, then the whole world . . . including all we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age . . . Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire . . . last[s] a thousand years, men will say this was their finest hour."

This was not said from a position of honor. Britain had turned her back on the small countries of Europe as Hitler rose. She had slept in ease. Her leadership had negotiated with, and appeased, Hitler for years, hoping to buy off evil. And when Britain had at last been forced to fight, she had been routed from the field of battle. And now Churchill and the British were facing the Battle of Britain in which the Luftwaffe would bomb to rubble the major cities of the nation . . . and still

Churchill was prophetic. It did turn out to be Britain's finest hour.

Because they at last stood up to the evil and wouldn't surrender to it.

We Catholics face a similar choice. Like Britain in the face of the rise of Nazism, we Catholics, especially our leaders, have spent too long cooperating with, or appeasing evil, or pretending it wasn't happening. But now the sin and crimes are coming into the open. Christian civilization is at stake, a new dark age approaches. We can leave the Church in this time of battle. We can hunker down and live our lives as though the battle wasn't happening. Or we can fight this spiritual war.

What will we each do in this time of God's judgment upon us?

Today in the Passion narrative we heard what Jesus did. He died on the cross for these sins of ours. He died to defeat the Devil and his evil – the moral filth of that time and this. He paid the ultimate price in this greatest war. What will each of us do? At the least, the American bishops at their June meeting must vote on the measures for their own accountability that Pope Francis stopped them from voting on in

November. I haven't forgotten that. I hope you haven't. But there's more to do. Will we stay, fight, and suffer alongside Jesus, or quit, or surrender to the evil? This can be our finest hour too, if we choose the battle and cross, because with it comes a promised and glorious resurrection. That is the situation and choice facing the Catholic Church and each of us this Holy Week.