

A couple of weeks ago I preached about the sexual abuse crisis, including the sins of ex-cardinal McCarrick. I said, “We need to find out who knew and did what, when.” Well, as many of you know, this week Archbishop Vigano, former papal Nuncio to the United States, accused Pope Francis and Pope-Emeritus Benedict of having known about McCarrick’s behavior, and Pope Francis ignoring the private penalties Benedict imposed, even making McCarrick his close advisor in the selection of American bishops. I don’t know if that’s true, but we need to find out. If the accusations are false – that’s wonderful. But if they’re true, let the chips fall where they may. Let all the ugly truth come out no matter where it leads. A wound has to be completely drained before it can heal. To that end, I’m offering a mass of reparation for the sins of the clergy involved in these scandals this Thursday at 7:00. If you feel the need to pray for the Church at this time, please join me.

Now to my homily: Many of you may remember the 1997 film Titanic. I haven’t seen it, but I believe that at the end of the film there’s

a brief shot of a Catholic priest praying the rosary with those left on board as the ship sinks into the water. The historical basis for that scene is Fr. Thomas Byles. Fr. Byles was an English priest. Born in 1870, he went to Oxford University, and there converted to Catholicism, along with his younger brother. He was ordained a priest in 1902.

In 1912 Fr. Byles' brother, who had moved to New York, asked him to come to America to do his wedding. Fr. Byles was initially planning on going on a different ship, but at the last minute switched to the Titanic. On Sunday, April 14, Fr. Byles celebrated mass for the passengers down in steerage, many of whom were Irish. He preached a homily on faith being like a life boat in case of ship wreck.

The next night the Titanic hit an iceberg and began sinking. As the huge ship began to go down, Fr. Byles helped the third-class passengers get up the stairs to the lifeboats. As you can imagine, it was chaos everywhere. But according to survivors, Fr. Byles calmed the chaos through his prayers and singing. Whenever the people started to panic

he would raise his hand and they would quiet down again. He heard the confessions of all who asked, as he directed the women and children to the top deck and the lifeboats. Twice Fr. Byles was offered a seat by the sailors, but he refused. A woman seated in the last lifeboat to leave the Titanic reported that she could distinctly hear Fr. Byles leading people in the rosary as they all slipped into the deep.

Today I would like to preach about *fidelity to our missions*. What is our personal mission in life? Do we remain faithful to it under pressure? How might we get distracted from it? In our Gospel Jesus confronts the Scribes and Pharisees, who are complaining that Jesus and His Disciples are ignoring God's Law – specifically regarding the washing of hands and purifying of cooking vessels. Now, Jesus is not condemning the whole Law. He just doesn't want the heart of God's Law to get lost, and even perverted, by less important things.

Here, think of Fr. Byles. I see him as a man who was radically faithful to his mission. When the crisis came he knew what his mission

was. When the ship hit the iceberg Fr. Byles recognized that this was his time to die. He didn't try to escape that fact. Instead, he remembered his vocation as a priest – to help his flock escape sin and get to heaven. In this case that meant consoling the frightened people. He heard confessions and escorted as many of the poor and weak as he could to the safety of the lifeboats. And those who would share his death, he accompanied to the end by leading them in prayer. Fr. Byles knew he was a shepherd, and even under the ultimate pressure, was faithful to Christ and those entrusted to him.

In these days of scandal Fr. Byles offers a clear model of fidelity for all clerics of the priestly vocation. There are many pieces that go into an adequate response to sexual abuse, but the most basic need is simple fidelity: to be faithful to whom God calls us to be.

Many Prelates who are guilty of allowing sexual abuse to continue did so because they were trying to protect the Church's, their friends' (and their own) reputation from scandal. They were trying to protect

the institution, but in doing so, put such lesser goods in front of protecting people, and vulnerable people at that – the very people Jesus wanted us to protect the most. Under pressure they lost sight of the basic point of God’s Law, and so were unfaithful shepherds.

But infidelity isn’t always so dramatic. How many times have I as a priest and Pastor missed out on Jesus’ will for me in a situation because I was so busy with lesser things on my schedule. I spend so much time on meetings, paperwork, and buildings, rather than the souls of the flock. Not that the facilities and meetings aren’t important. They just aren’t first – but too often the first things, people, are neglected because lesser things seem more important, or at least more urgent. Fr. Byles knew that what mattered wasn’t his life or security, but the sins, souls and salvation of his flock. He is a challenging reminder to me.

But it’s not only clerics who are unfaithful to their vocations. The laity are also vulnerable to misplaced priorities. Think about your own mission in life. I don’t know the details, but I do know that your mission

isn't to succeed in your career, make money, be admired, or be comfortable. Your own mission in life is, first, to praise and worship God, then it's to help your spouse and kids praise and worship God – and love, care for, and protect them. And after that, to care for the other people around you – starting with the weakest and poorest.

Right now, today, under the pressures of daily life, have lesser things obscured those missions? Have we drifted into infidelity? Are our lives ordered to their true priorities, or are they concerned with the pots and pans and the washing of hands? Take a hard look at your life, as I should mine. Are we being faithful to our mission in life? One day soon we will each hit our own iceberg that will send us to death. Our ship is sinking. Only fidelity will see us through.