

This week the American Bishops met in Baltimore to discuss the sex abuse crisis. I want to share some thoughts about that meeting, but in the context of today's scriptures. The Gospel is Mark 13:24-32. "They will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather the elect." And there's the first reading from Dan. 12. "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress, since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book." Such scriptures are Apocalyptic writings. "Apocalypse" means "revelation," or the unveiling of the meaning of things.

The point of apocalyptic literature is to reveal to the People of God the great truth of God's power in times of stress, anxiety, or persecution. Christ is the Victor over sin and death and reigns supreme. So, no matter how bad things seem, we're to remember how the story ends, with Jesus coming again in glory. If the story of our life and

history seem like a scary thriller, then apocalyptic scripture is like God saying to us, “Go read the last chapter of the story first and seeing how it all turns out.” Jesus and His people win so we can face the challenges we face, we can live out our story, with calm courage, faith and peace.

We’re living in apocalyptic times. I’m not predicting the end of the world, but the world and Church are in crisis. And I want to address the Bishops’ meeting with that in mind. I planned on preaching about the bishops’ decisions regarding sexual abuse, but as you may know Pope Francis at the last minute told the Bishops not to vote on the measures they had proposed for zero-tolerance for bishops involved in misconduct, and for the formation of lay-led review boards for investigation of such charges and of the events surrounding Ted McCarrick and his role in the Church. The Pope asked them to wait for the results of a meeting about sex abuse involving all the Presidents of the Bishops Conferences throughout the world to be held in February.

There was a positive development in Baltimore, but also things that disturbed me. I drew comfort from the bishops at last beginning to speak to one another in real terms, not bishop-speak. There was some willingness to confront one another with their true beliefs about abuse and its root causes. There's still a long way to go, but my basic point is that there must be a change of culture within bishops' circles. They must be able to call each other out when one of them sins or makes horrible decisions, including being willing to tell one another when a bishop should resign. A unity based on ignoring problems isn't real unity. True unity can only form around the truth, so the truth must come out. Perhaps we saw small steps in that directions.

But I was also disappointed that the American Bishops didn't express any dissatisfaction with Pope Francis' actions. I get it that it's hard to disagree with the boss, and unity with the Pope is vital. But this isn't about doctrine, but prudential judgements, and the worldwide sex

abuse crisis won't be solved until everyone, including the Pope, realizes that it's the top priority. I'm not sure the Pope really believes that yet.

Given that, here's the resolution I wish the Bishops had passed and sent to the Pope. "Your Holiness: We want to begin by expressing our loyalty to you as the Successor to St. Peter and the Vicar of Christ on earth. It is from this loyalty and regard that we did not vote on the proposals we had prepared – as you asked. But it is also out of that same mature loyalty that we must share our counsel with you. We regret that you required us to miss this timely opportunity to address this most important crisis facing the Catholic Church today – the sexual abuse of minors by clerics, and corruption within the episcopacy. You believe that we should wait until the bishops of the world debate the matter in February. But most of the bishops of the world have less experience than we have in this matter. The problem is everywhere, but it has been avoided or denied in too many places. We bishops in America have been slow in coming to grips it, but at least we have gone

farther than most of the Church. We are afraid that when the world's other bishops gather in February the measures taken will be inadequate for the situation. Instead of leading the Church from our experience, we'll be stuck with half-measures or mere words that fail to persuade our flocks we're serious about this crisis.

We must also ask you respectfully to reconsider your denial of our request to begin an investigation into the events surrounding former-Cardinal McCarrick. You recently sent an investigation team to the Diocese of Memphis to look into rumors of its bishop's gross administrative incompetence – and you removed the bishop when you found evidence to support the rumors. Why not send a similar investigator to explore the McCarrick scandal? You have said that at some unknown time in the future you would release some of the documents in Rome touching upon McCarrick, but that is not the same as an investigator calling witnesses on the ground.

Furthermore, we regret you asked us this week, through your Papal Nuncio, to avoid using lay people to investigate bishops' misconduct. Our experience in America of lay review boards has been very positive. It is difficult for us to remove from ministry those priests we know and have worked with. It can't be any easier for you to remove bishops or Cardinals who have sinned. It helps to have outside, more objective, eyes look at a situation. We suggest that, rather than oppose this idea, you embrace it and form lay review boards in each of the continents to help you investigate accusations against bishops and cardinals in them.

To be frank, given the charges Archbishop Vigano has leveled against you and your inner circle about ignoring or even cooperating with McCarrick and his sexual predation, your refusal to accept an impartial investigation into such matters opens you, and the Church in general, to suspicions that we're stonewalling, or we simply don't want the truth to come out. Without that transparency we're afraid that

some will begin to see you and the Roman Curia as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to this gravest of crises.

Your Holiness, this letter is written out of a true loyalty to you, your office, and a love for the Church. It is not meant to undermine you, but to strengthen your position in the eyes of the faithful, and to encourage a trust in humility, courage, transparency, and faith. Christ's Church can survive the truth, as ugly as that is, if we trust in those virtues, and get it all out, because Jesus promised He won't abandon us, even in our sin." That is what I wish the Bishops had done in Baltimore.

To come back to the apocalyptic scriptures I began with, I know many are doubting the Church – or are afraid that things are falling apart. And this feels true for the wider world, not within the Church. These are apocalyptic times. Much evil is being revealed. But remember how it all ends. There will be distress and sin of great proportions. God knows that. He warned us of it. And we feel that today. So, He let us read the ending first. Remember these scriptures. For those who are

worried, in the end Jesus comes back in glory for those who remain faithful to Him. Let that be our peace and calm -- and our strength as we resist the evil of the times alongside Jesus.