

You may have noticed that I'm wearing a black vestment tonight. Black is rarely worn at mass these days. It's a rarely used option only at funerals and on All Souls day, but I felt it was appropriate tonight because liturgically black symbolizes grief and sorrow. And that is what we are experiencing in the midst of the on-going scandals in the Church. And anger: I asked one parishioner last week how she was feeling, and she said, "I'm angry." I can understand that. There's a lot to be angry about. Sixteen years ago, most of you went through similar feelings as the sex abuse scandal started in Boston and spread everywhere. You might ask, "Why are we being put through this again by our leaders? Hasn't anything changed?" And for some of you who don't remember 2002, this experience of shame and anger is accompanied by the shock of the new.

I will address those issues, but first I want to talk about why we're here tonight. In the face of evil and crisis our first response as Catholics should be prayer to God, who alone will save us. That certainly doesn't

mean prayer is our only response – or is itself sufficient, but prayer comes first. That is why we are here tonight -- to pray. This is a mass of reparation for the sins of the clergy involved in the scandals -- sins of commission and omission. “Reparation” means making amends or repairing. On the one hand, we can’t repair the physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering of the victims themselves and of their families. I have had occasion to meet with perhaps a half dozen victims (one a teammate from my high school football team). I have spoken with even more of their family members. And then there are those unknown crowds of former-Catholics who have left the Church over these scandals and never darken our doors anymore.

I don’t kid myself that this mass will end their pain. But while we can’t repair all the wounds caused by the scandals of the clergy with this mass, we are called as Catholics to seek spiritual blessings for those we have hurt. So, we do acknowledge, first and foremost, our duty to

make reparation to the victims and also for their families for the sins and crimes committed against them by clergy.

But the repairs must also go beyond the direct victims. All Catholics have been wounded by these scandals. We must also pray tonight for the Church, because the Body of Christ is suffering and gravely wounded by these sins. I see the original crisis that came to light back in 2002 as being a crisis of the priesthood. Although the bishops who moved and covered up priests' sins were noted at the time, the main effort was to change our priestly culture and establish norms and procedures to ensure priests did not sexually abuse minors, and if they did, that they would be quickly reported and removed.

We are still not perfect. Since 2002 I believe there has been one new case of abuse reported in our Archdiocese. And even one is one too many. But there has been a culture shift. Change has happened. In the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report (and in the inevitable future

reports from other states) most of what is reported, although gross and repellent, is old news.

But, while there has been improvement in terms of sexual abuse of minors by priests, the new dimension of this scandal, I believe, centers on the bishops – and, now, Popes. What is new is the need for the investigation and purification of their behavior and culture. How does someone like former Cardinal McCarrick even happen? Everybody knew, as the saying goes. What must be the culture of the bishops if McCarrick's peers felt they need not, or could not, report such sins? Bishops must get their own house in order if they are to lead and shepherd us effectively. They must call all of us to live the full gospel, including the virtue of chastity – and not just chastity towards minors (what a low bar that is!). But to do that effectively they must lead by personal example.

And there must be transparency in our current actions – and in what happened in the past. There is still a culture of secrecy among the

bishops and Popes. Why? In the words of Bob Dylan, “When you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose.” We Catholic clerics have no reputation left. We have nothing to lose any more by a thorough airing of our sins. Why not get it all out there? It’s the only way we can heal. Sunlight is the great disinfectant.

And here I come to the scandal surrounding Archbishop Vigano’s letter alleging Pope Emeritus Benedict and Pope Francis knew about McCarrick’s sins, and that Pope Francis rehabilitated McCarrick after the weak private disciplines Benedict had imposed on him, even making McCarrick a trusted advisor regarding the appointment of American bishops. I don’t know if these accusations are true. But I was trained as a historian, and that taught me – if you want the truth, get to the documents! Pope Francis needs to open all the files and explain his own side of the story. The American bishops (and faithful) are calling for such an investigation.

There is a spiritual principle that one doesn't defend oneself from accusations. Perhaps Pope Francis is thinking of that principle in not explaining what happened. But a close examination of that spiritual principle shows that it actually says that when silence will cause scandal, one should explain and deny the false charges – and if one is still not believed, only then should one assume silence and let God defend oneself. The Pope may believe he's acting with humility, but he has been accused of very serious charges by a credible (even if hostile) witness in a position to know of what he speaks. There is danger that silence in such a position may not be perceived as humility, but as the arrogance of the powerful who can't be forced to talk.

At this time the Catholic Church needs as her leader and public face someone who can speak credibly and with moral authority about sexual abuse. Without speaking out convincingly concerning the accusations the Pope won't be able to do that. So, let's get it all out in

the open. Open all the Vatican files about McCarrick and who knew what, when.

I wish I could tell you the scandals are now all in the past. But I'm afraid that we are in for a period of history when there will be an on-going, painful purification of the Catholic Church as the ugly truths of the past and present are revealed. That is also why we must pray, for our own faith. The greatest tragedy of these scandals – after the suffering of the victims themselves – is what they have done to the faith of the laity, and the ability of the Church to evangelize the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. How many will suffer spiritually because the message of Christ has been muffled by the shame of these sins?

I have personally begun a personal fast and a new prayer discipline for the Church. I ask you also to fast and prayer for the Church at this time because ultimately, even if we all we can, it is only God who can save His Church. But I do believe He will do this if we remain faithful. We are alive at this historic time for better and worse.

We are suffering for the sins of others, but we also have the opportunity to be heroic when others have faltered, to press on when others turn back. Christ's Church will endure. He has promised us that. Let us follow Him, then, through this Calvary, so as to share His heaven.