

We hear in today's Gospel passage that many of the Jews who had been following Jesus left after He proclaimed that his Body and Blood literally needed to be consumed in order to have everlasting life. We hear the words in the Gospel and we ourselves sometimes have difficulty with such a command. Imagine how much more difficult it was for those who first heard such words to commit to them. We can not blame those persons for walking away. Much less can we call those specific people traitors to Jesus. Hopefully with the help of God, at some point later they reconsidered and joined the Church.

There is a class of people however who can be called traitors to God. Foremost among them are those men who, having been given positions of leadership and trust in God's Church, broke that trust in the most vile and reprehensible ways. I speak as you no doubt grasp of priests and bishops who either committed sexual assaults upon those sons and daughters of the Church placed in their spiritual care; or knowing of such assaults chose to hide and conceal them from the law. I do not use the term "treason" lightly. Like many of you I come from a military family. My grandfather was career army; my father, my brother, and several of my cousins were servicemen. And though I myself did not serve in the Armed Forces I think that I have imbibed some of their reverence for keeping an oath. I, like every other priest, made promises to God at my ordination to serve Christ and His Church and to help bring about not only my own salvation, but that of the people of God placed in my care. To hear of priests and bishops breaking their promises to serve God and neighbor in such a horrific fashion is maddeningly.

Maddeningly for the harm they have done. First and foremost to their specific victims. Many of them have suffered and will continue to suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma due to the actions that were done to them. For those persons who have suffered abuse at the hands of priests or bishops I can only say I am sorry. I lack the words to express my sorrow for what they have suffered any other way.

Maddeningly, also for the harm they have caused the Church. At a time in our history when the moral teaching of God is desperately needed, when moral standards all around us are collapsing, the ability of the Church to teach has been undermined. It has been undermined by those persons, among whom are many bishops, who put church before Christ. It is true that the Catholic Church and Jesus Christ are one. They are joined together in a mystical union. However, while it is correct to say that Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, can exist without the Church; it is not correct to say that the Church can exist without Christ. The Church can not and does not exist without Jesus Christ. Those bishops who put friendship, a desire to avoid scandal, loss of reputation, loss of money, or worse of all - the exposure of their own crimes; before their duty to God and to the People of God in their care are deserving of the severest censure.

It has been pointed out that priests and bishops are not the only ones who have committed abuses. And this is correct. Sadly, we see examples of sexual abuse throughout our society. And no one group of people is exempt from such a disgrace. However, I don't take much comfort in this fact. The Christian people are not charged by Jesus Christ to be just like everybody else, and this is especially true for those men who are called to exercise leadership in the Church. We are called to be holy as God is holy. And though we will fall short of that lofty goal it remains our goal. To be blunt, the Christian people ought to be able to expect that their priests and bishops are better than "everyone else," not just like everyone else.

I ask of you to pray. I ask you to pray first for those persons who have been abused by clergy. That God may grant them healing in mind, body, and soul. I also ask of you to pray for those priests and bishops who committed such abuses. Unless they truly and sincerely repent of the great evil they have done they will suffer damnation at the Judgement and the fires of hell for all eternity. No Christian should desire that of anybody, even those who seem to deserve it. I also ask of you to pray for all priests and bishops who have remained faithful to their promises to care for the people of God. This is not an easy time to be a priest. For myself, I began my preparations for the

priesthood after the abuse scandal broke open back around 2000. I knew going in that the priesthood would not be comfortable or perhaps even respectable as it once was. Despite knowing that I chose to enter into the priesthood. I believe in Jesus Christ, the mission of the Church, and I desire to serve God by aiding faithful Christians to attain the salvation through the sacraments that God wants for you. I promise you that there are still many priests and bishops who hold to this as well. Do not abandon them.

Furthermore, I ask of you pray for the good of the Catholic Church. That the evil that has crept into the Church may be purged away. Despite all the many grievous faults leaders of the Church have committed, it still does not change the truth that the Church is the means that God has created to bring human beings to salvation. Demand that leaders in the Church continue to strip away the filth and corruption that has accumulated. That the traitors to Christ will be exposed and that the false teachings which stated that such evil actions weren't really wrong or sinful will be wiped away. By your prayers and yes, by your actions, help to bring about in the Church a new flowering of holiness and purity.