



Enough Already

A Reflection on the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows – September 15, 2018

Every day for Catholics there is another dose of heartbreak – how could these men who made these sacred promises before God and on our behalf do such criminal and heartless things? How could this Church which we love so much harbor such terrible secrets? Even those who lead are named as abusers, harassers, or enablers. In the press and in social media, we witness the anger and see our Sisters and Brothers asking – why should I remain a Catholic? In our Order, we hear some question whether they should withdraw support from our Charities or even leave our Fellowship altogether.

These are troubling days, and it is easy to give way to anger and despair. I myself scour the reports daily, more often depressed by what I hear, but listening for signs of hope.

I will not give up on the Church. I have lived long enough to know that this is my spiritual home, even if it needs to be cleaned. We heard in the Gospel readings over these last few miserable weeks about how some disciples walked away when they found the teaching hard or the way difficult. I pray each day in Peter's words: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of everlasting life."

I share these reflections because I know that you, too, experience this ache for how the Church seems to be coming apart. Men at the top of the Church, choosing sides, picking factions. Should Pope Francis stay on or resign? Should any bishop or cardinal accused of covering up stay or be forced to resign? Should there be more Grand Juries until every file is turned out and every secret fault exposed?

I pray that this might pass soon. My experience tells me this will take time, but my faith tells me that when this crisis is passed, as it inevitably will be, the Church will be better, safer, and stronger. My fellow Knights and Dames, let me offer these signs I see in these troubling and difficult times, and ask you to pray with me for healing and reform:

1. In part, we are reading about sexual exploitation of children. What happened to them at the hands of trusted ministers should never have happened. This was criminal and this was sinful. People legitimately want to know – are our children safe? In the reports I have read, including the excerpts from the Grand Jury, there is a dividing line at 2002. After 2002, the year of "Spotlight," the Charter for the Protection of Children and the reforms put in place by the body of bishops and religious superiors seem to work: crimes are reported, those who commit them are removed from ministry, there is pastoral outreach to the victims, and reports to the people. Confidentiality agreements are banned (unless a victim wants one for privacy), and those who commit these crimes against children are permanently removed. Proactively, children and their parents are educated, clergy and employees are checked and vetted, and there is cooperation with law enforcement. Are we reading about that hopeful sign in the press? Likely not. But do not take my word for it; look for yourselves. It is not perfect, but even the Pennsylvania Grand Jury called it a sign of hope. Yet, whether before 2002 or since, crimes and sins were committed, and there should be accountability.

2. In part, we are also reading about the secrecy of those who enabled abusers. Here we have fewer facts and it is easy to jump to conclusions when we do not know all the facts. But as the facts come to light, those who protected abusers are being made to account for their behavior. Where bishops and other leaders looked away or choose to lift institutional interests over the victims, we are just beginning to hear a cry for the facts, and if warranted, a reckoning. Although we do not know where this will lead, I take hope from the fact that the leaders of the Church are looking for a broad external review to lead to action, and to make themselves more accountable. The roots are already there. Consider this – what opened up the conduct of Archbishop McCarrick to removal from the College of Cardinals was a report, under the 2002 Charter, investigated by a diocesan office staff and acted upon by a review board, a canonical requirement since 2002, consisting mostly of laity not in the employ of the Church. They did what clerics apparently did not.

3. In part, we are also reading about a clerical culture that can wall off priests and bishops from people, and operate apart from the common sense rules that should guide all of us. I hope that those responsible for this culture will see where this has brought us. If we want our priests to thrive, we must support and help them.

So for me, an even greater sign of hope is the many thousands of good and faithful priests, who, like us, suffer under this load of pain and despair but who, unlike us, suffer the looks and suspicion of others. That they continue to pray with us, celebrate the sacraments, comfort us, baptize our children and bury our dead – that is a powerful sign of hope. We pray that they do not give up. Likewise – we should not give up.

Some are tempted to withhold financial support from the Church “until it is reformed.” Some are tempted to abandon the Order and its works “until things change.” I understand those feelings entirely. But those actions will not reform the Church, change the hearts of its leaders or heal the victims of abuse. Rather, withholding financial support from our parishes and dioceses will hurt our schools, catholic charities, and seminaries; and then those who wait on what they think is the self-destruction of the Church will rejoice. Abandoning the Order or withholding financial support will further impoverish those we serve, where our support extends throughout the Middle East. Our tangible presence to the Church in the Holy Land will be diminished contributing to the plight of our brothers and sisters who experience a crisis of their own everyday.

There are many who are hurting, victims of abuse and secrecy. Those who have been abused suffer beyond what I can comprehend. Their lives are forever changed. I ache for them. I hold them close in daily prayer. I ask that you do the same.

This is not the time for us to turn our backs on each other, for in our fellowship there is strength. In our community there is sustenance. In our common prayer, there beats the heart of the Church. So I ask you to join more tightly together, and pray in confidence and hope for the healing and reform of the Church. We should be witnesses to Her perseverance.

In this I pray,

H. E. Valencia Yvonne Camp, DGCHS
Lieutenant