

**HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2018) B**

OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS AFTER MASS WHILE GREETING WORSHIPPERS, WITH FR. BRIAN AND FR. DANIEL, A NUMBER OF PEOPLE HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR DISMAY, DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISCOURAGEMENT REGARDING THE INVESTIGATION DONE BY A PENNSYLVANIA GRAND JURY INTO CHILD ABUSE COMMITTED BY PRIESTS IN ITS SIX DIOCESES OVER THE PAST 70 YEARS AND EVEN MORE RECENTLY REPORTS THAT ALLEGE, IN SOME INSTANCES, ATTEMPTS TO COVER UP MISCONDUCT BY INDIVIDUAL BISHOPS.

“WHAT IS HAPPENING?”, THEY ASK. “WHERE IS THIS GOING?” “WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR CHURCH?”

I THINK THAT IT IS FORTUITOUS PERHAPS EVEN DIVINE INTERVENTION THAT THIS GOSPEL EXCERPT FROM MARK SHOULD COME AT THIS TIME OF CONFUSION, PAIN, DOUBT AND ANGER IN THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. I HESITATE TO USE THE TERM CHURCH BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE TERM CHURCH HAS LOST ITS REAL MEANING. I WILL TOUCH ON THIS LATER.

IN TODAY’S GOSPEL READING JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES ARE CRITICIZED AND ATTACKED BY A GROUP OF PHARISEES AND OFFICIALS FROM THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. THEY WANT TO KNOW WHY JESUS’ DISCIPLES DON’T FOLLOW THE RITUALS SET OUT IN THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS WHICH ARE ANCIENT TRADITIONS IN THE HEBREW FAITH AND CULTURE. JESUS IS FAR FROM SHY OR DEFERENTIAL IN HIS RESPONSE. HE COMES RIGHT AT THEM. HE CALLS THEM HYPOCRITES AND QUOTES FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH,

THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,

BUT THEIR HEARTS ARE FAR FROM ME;

IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,

TEACHING AS DOCTRINE HUMAN PRECEPTS.

WHEN JESUS SAYS THIS TO THEM HE KNOWS THAT AS MEN SCHOOLED IN THE HEBREWS SCRIPTURES THEIR MINDS WOULD IMMEDIATELY GO TO THE WORDS SPOKEN BY MOSES TO THE HEBREW PEOPLE WHICH WE HEARD IN THE FIRST READING FROM DEUTERONOMY,

“IN YOUR OBSERVANCE OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD, YOUR GOD, WHICH I ENJOIN UPON YOU, **YOU SHALL NOT ADD TO WHAT I COMMAND NOR SUBTRACT FROM IT.**”

THESE ARE THE SAME LEADERS WHO JESUS CRITICIZES FOR CREATING HEAVY BURDENS FOR THE PEOPLE TO CARRY, WHILE EXEMPTING THEMSELVES. BUT, REMEMBER JESUS' WORDS, “COME TO ME YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE BURDENED AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.”

JESUS CONFRONTS THESE SYNAGOGUE AND TEMPLE LEADERS FOR EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF MAN MADE RULES AND TRADITIONS OVER THE VERY COMMANDMENTS HANDED DOWN BY GOD TO MOSES. HE LOOKS INTO THEIR HEARTS FROM WHENCE TRUE EVIL FLOWS, NOT FROM DIRTY HANDS OR

UNCLEAN POTS AND PANS, AND CALLS THEM OUT FOR THESE EVILS, AMONG THEM UNCHASTITY, GREED, ARROGANCE AND FOLLY.

MY FRIENDS, AS WE GATHER TOGETHER THIS MORNING, THIS SAME JESUS IS TRULY PRESENT AMONG US , BUT IF WE WERE ABLE TO HEAR HIM SPEAK IN HIS OWN VOICE I BELIEVE HE WOULD ADDRESS THE REBUKE HE AIMED AT THE SYNAGOGUE AND TEMPLE LEADERS TO THE PRIESTS AND BISHOPS WHO PERPETRATED THE VILE SINS AND CRIMES OF ABUSE UPON INNOCENT CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS AND EVEN MORE POINTEDLY AT THE DEACONS, PRIESTS, BISHOPS AND PERHAPS EVEN POPES WHO TURNED A BLIND EYE AND FAILED TO ACT, IN THE CASE OF SOME BISHOPS, BY SERIALY TRANSFERRING THE OFFENDERS FROM PARISH TO PARISH, AND OTHERS FOR FAILING TO REPORT THEM TO THOSE WHO COULD TAKE DECISIVE ACTION. ALL, IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING THE CHURCH FROM SCANDAL, AND THIS IS WHERE I'LL RETURN TO WHY I SAID A HESITATE TO USE THE TERM CHURCH. THEY DIDN'T COVER UP THESE CRIMES TO PROTECT THE CHURCH, THEY COVERED THEM UP TO PROTECT THEMSELVES, THEIR POWER AND AUTHORITY, TO PROTECT AN INSTITUTION, WHICH IN A PERVERTED WAY HAD BECOME SYNONOMOUS WITH THE CHURCH. THEY FORGOT HUMILITY AND THAT WITH AUTHOITY COMES RESPONSIBILITY. THE TWO ARE INSEPARABLE. WHAT THEY DID WAS DONE TO PRESERVE THEIR OWN MORAL AUTHORITY OVER YOU, WHICH, IRONICALLY, THEY HAVE LOST BECAUSE OF IT. BUT THE CHURCH IS NOT PRIMARILY AN INSTITUTION, IT IS NOT THE HIERARCHY OR THE CLERGY. YOU ARE THE CHURCH, THE PEOPLE OF GOD. REGRETTABLY, HISTORY SHOWS US INSTANCES

OF CHURCHMEN DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES WHO HAVE ACTED WITH THE ARROGANCE OF THE LEADERS WHO CONFRONTED JESUS. THEY HAVE GOTTEN CAUGHT UP IN THE MODEL OF THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION, AS SOME KIND OF MEDIEVAL FIEFDOM RULED OVER BY A MONARCH, PRINCES AND LORDS AND HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT THEY ARE IN ACTUALITY THE SERVANTS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, CALLED BY JESUS FROM AMONG HIS PEOPLE TO SERVE HIM BY SERVING HIS FLOCK.

MY FRIENDS, I FEAR THAT IT MAY ONLY GET WORSE BEFORE IT GETS BETTER. BUT THE PEOPLE OF GOD WILL RISE ABOVE IT IF WE GET BACK TO THE BASICS. WE ARE NOT CALLED TO FOLLOW DEACONS, PRIESTS, BISHOPS OR POPES, WE ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW JESUS AND ONLY JESUS. I PLEAD WITH YOU ALL, TAKE OUT YOUR BIBLES. READ THE GOSPELS. SCRIPTURE, THE EUCHARIST AND IN THE SOLIDARITY OF OUR PRAYER HERE TOGETHER IS WHERE WE WILL TRULY ENCOUNTER JESUS AND DEVELOP A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. AND EVEN IF YOUR FAITH IN HUMAN LEADERS IS SHAKEN, NEVER LOSE YOUR FAITH IN JESUS. MAKE THE GOSPELS A PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE AND COME TO THE EUCHARIST ON SUNDAY WITH A HEART OPENED **BY** JESUS AND **TO** JESUS BY THE GOSPELS, AND IN THE EUCHARIST RECIVE HIM PHYSICALLY INTO YOU LIFE. JESUS IS WHY WE ARE HERE. JESUS WHO WAS MEEK AND HUMBLE OF HEART, DID NOT HAVE A LOT OF RULES NOR DID HE LEAD WITH ARROGANCE OR GRANDEUR. HE HAD ONLY TWO COMMANDMENTS FOR US, WHICH ENCOMPASS THE TEN GIVEN BY HIS FATHER TO MOSES: LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL AND ALL YOUR MIND, AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS

YOURSELF. THE GOSPELS AND THE EUCHARIST ARE JESUS' PRECIOUS GIFTS TO US, TO STRENGTHEN US IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY, COMFORT US IN OUR SORROW AND FORTIFY US IN OUR JUST ANGER AND OUR RESOLVE TO NEVER, EVER LET THIS HAPPEN AGAIN TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. FAITH IN JESUS, AND ONLY JESUS, IS THE ANSWER.