



Put Out Into the Deep

Justice and Forgiveness

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

The sexual abuse of a child is a crime and a sin. Church leadership always seemed to understand that child abuse was sinful and the abuser in need of repentance. Tragically, mistakes were made and all too often leadership failed to recognize that we were also dealing with crimes.

The press has not caused this scandal. Unfortunately, it was members of the Church who committed unspeakable crimes against innocent children. At the same time, the media and especially the press have exploited this scandal in the last several months.

In the past year, the United States Catholic Conference's report on compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People indicated that "in 2009 there were 398 allegations and 286 offenders reported to dioceses, most from earlier decades. Of the allegations reported in 2009, six allegations (2%) involved children under the age of 18 in 2009. About an eighth of the allegations in 2009 (48) were unsubstantiated or determined to be false by the end of the year." Consider the context; there are 70 million Catholics in the U.S. and more than 41,400 priests.

The place of the press in a free society is to deliver the truth, to keep a society free and honest. The press also has a responsibility to report the truth correctly, without bias. Unfortunately, this, I believe, has not happened in the past several months.

The fact is that abuse is a societal problem. George Weigel took note of the fact in a recent Newsweek article. Citing Charol Shakeshaft of Virginia Commonwealth University, he reminded readers that in a 10-year period, 1991-2000, there were 290,000 cases of sexual abuse in American public schools. That is a disturbing statistic in light of national statistics that indicate that between 40%-60% of abuse takes place in the home.

During the Chrism Mass on March 30, I singled out The New York Times for its coverage of this issue, which at best seems to be selective. Recent articles in other responsible newspapers have pointed out the inconsistencies and bias in The New York Times reporting of this issue. This is particularly the case in the selective reporting of documents that have been given to the press by attorneys who have made millions of dollars in suing the Church. Taken out of context, these documents attempt to implicate Pope Benedict XVI, as then-Cardinal Ratzinger, in his role as head of the

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I am sure that time will completely exonerate our Holy Father from any part in the so-called "cover-up" or even inadequate handling of cases that were submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when he was its prefect.

Before he became pope on Good Friday five years ago, as he conducted the Stations of the Cross at the Coliseum in Rome, he said, "Christ suffers in his own Church." Then Cardinal Ratzinger continued, "How much filth there is in the Church, and even among those who, in the priesthood, ought to belong entirely to him." So heavily had this subject weighed on his mind that he identifies how we all might feel, like "a boat about to sink, a boat taking in water on every side."

As prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he worked harder than anyone in the Church to cleanse the Church of the scandal of sex abuse. There are those, however, who believe that anyone cleaning up a mess must have dirty hands. Intimations like this are totally unacceptable. We can look at the recent record of our Holy Father to understand his treatment of this problem in the Church.

Most recently his pastoral letter to the Catholics of Ireland is an excellent example of the depths of the Holy Father's understanding of the problem and his admission of the guilt of Church leaders and members and a show of compassion for victims, their families and their resolve to rid the Church of this type of behavior forever. This pastoral letter is available on the Vatican News Service website, www.vaticannews.org. It is well worth reading.

It is difficult in hindsight to judge the circumstances from the past and the understanding of sexual abuse at that time and the way it was handled. Clearly, in the present this type of administrative inadequacy would never occur. The case of a priest in Germany from the Diocese of Munich and how he was reassigned after abusing a minor has been attributed to a lack of leadership or oversight of the then-Cardinal Ratzinger. It was unfortunate that a seeming error of oversight which occurred over 30 years ago should be given the attention that it has been given in the desperate attempt to implicate the Holy Father in a cover-up or at least guilt by association and inadequate supervision.

In 2002, the U.S. Bishops adopted their Dallas Charter which is clear testimony to a new way of

handling perpetrators and victims. I cannot emphasize enough the shame and sorrow on the part of the Church for the past abuse of children. We must look to the future to make sure that it never occurs again with impunity as it might have occurred in the past.

On this past Good Friday, the preacher of the Papal Household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, in the conclusion of his long Good Friday homily, read a letter sent to him by a Jewish friend in which the friend likened the current treatment of the Church to anti-Semitism. Father Cantalamessa has recently apologized and clarified his intention.

If the homily is read in its entirety, which is available on Zenit at www.zenit.org, I do not see how anyone could interpret the comment as a mean-spirited remark. His intention, as it was suggested by his friend, is that logically we cannot pass blame for any action or immune guilt for the actions of any particular individual. But again we see the media frenzy regarding anything that is said in this regard. I am sure too that this article will be dissected and criticized in many ways.

I once had a conversation with Father Cantalamessa in which he observed, "In this country everything is permitted, but nothing is forgiven." This deeply spiritual and wise man perhaps touched on the insight that we need in our world today. In an atmosphere of permissiveness, we must expect grievous failures, but forgiveness or compassion does not mean consent or insensitivity for the terrible abuse suffered by victims. Perhaps this is critical if we are ever to move from victim to survivors. From a Christian perspective, justice must be counter balanced by charity and if we are to be free of the bondage of sin we must embrace forgiveness which enables us to have compassion for all involved in any tragic situation such as child abuse.

Together let us put out into the deep waters which seem so murky. As the chief shepherd, I once again humbly beg forgiveness of those who have been abused by priests or religious. I also ask forgiveness, in the name of the Church, of you the good and faithful Catholics of our diocese so disgusted and dispirited by this scandal. Join me in prayer, especially using the words of the Our Father which give us the Lord's own insight into forgiveness and redemption.

Lourdes

◀ Continued from Page 2

of the Lourdes Volunteers.

If you are French-speaking, you can also contact the Hospitalite office at the Shrine for low-tech training in the skills necessary to help physically challenged people get around.

I had a couple of unexpected bless-

ings on my trip this year. I stopped at Paris on my way back to New York to break up the otherwise long trip home. I stayed at the Motherhouse of the Vincentian priests. The Vincentians run St. John's University here in the Brooklyn Diocese. They have a campus in Paris right next door to their headquarters. There are currently 97 students there. The students stay in Paris for five weeks. St. John's also has campuses in Rome and in Ireland. I was

very pleased at the maturity of the students I met in Paris.

While in Paris, I also visited the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, only four or five blocks from the Vincentian Headquarters. This chapel is the place where Our Lady appeared to St. Margaret Mary. Being the home of the Miraculous Medal, it is a place of deep prayer. Every time I have visited, there were several hundred people in the chapel. Despite the large number of people praying there, I

have not been aware of their presence. The only other place where I have had that experience is the Shrine of Martyrs of Tyburn Hill in London.

I would urge everyone to make at least one visit to Lourdes in their lifetime. The Shrine has a website that gives a full schedule of the pilgrimage groups scheduled to visit.

Father Mulkerin is the director of the diocesan Propagation of the Faith Office.