

Today I would like to address the scandals in the Church that are making the news, specifically, the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report and the ex-Cardinal McCarrick scandal. The Pennsylvania Report is an in-depth treatment of the clergy sexual abuse and its coverup over the last 70 years in that state. The shocking numbers in the report are mostly old news, known since the original sex abuse scandal erupted fifteen years ago. What is new is the heart-breaking and revolting details of what really happened. Before, the crime and sin could be thought of in the abstract, but the report makes them real to our imaginations and emotions. So, it feels like a whole new scandal.

I want to apologize again with great sorrow for all priests and bishops who caused this scandal -- for our crimes, sins, failures and self-serving moral cowardice in all of this. I'm sure there is understandably great anger and shame in your own hearts, as Catholics. But I hope you will still believe me when I say that the situation has changed markedly since 2002. I, the whole parish staff, and the Archdiocese, take the safe

environment procedures very seriously, and, while we remain imperfect, the Catholic Church is a safe place for young people today.

What is new is the McCarrick scandal, where a priest rose through the ranks from bishop, to Archbishop, to Cardinal – all the while repeatedly engaging in consensual and non-consensual sexual acts with seminarians -- some being minors at the time of the abuse. On top of that, this was known or rumored for decades. Like the “MeToo” movement, it was a case of “everybody knowing” about him, but nobody acting – or if they did act, nothing was done by those with authority to act. It is impossible to believe that there aren’t many priests and bishops who knew about (and, yes, participated in) these sins and crimes. We need to find out who knew and did what and when. Who championed his career? Which priests and bishops did McCarrick push forward for positions in the hierarchy, because it’s hard to believe, given his track record, that those close to him were unaware of his crimes and sinful lifestyle? This is not a matter of just one man.

To that end, on Thursday Cardinal DiNardo, President of the U.S. Bishops' conference, called for a Vatican investigation staffed mostly by lay people, who are experts in such investigations and crimes (The document can be found in the bulletin). This investigation will look at who did what regarding the McCarrick scandal, but it will also create ways those who have been abused by Bishops can report safely and be heard. Obviously, the Bishops have seriously compromised credibility in this matter, so this is a good start, but only a start – and it all depends on how courageous the bishops are in following through, how willing they are to look at ALL the ugliness and take the repercussions. They have a lot to prove. Let us pray for them.

At the heart of this ugliness is the question, “Do we bishops and priests really believe what we teach and preach on morals and the value of the human soul and person?” Because, I know, from the behavior of some of us, it doesn't look like it. It's not just the sin, it's the hypocrisy. In a marriage, when there are tensions and hard times,

even sins, the relationship can survive the anger. But when the anger turns to disgust, and then contempt, it's really hard to recover the love. We're near that point for many lay people (and some priests, too) in the Catholic Church in America, where anger and shame start to turn to disgust and contempt for the clergy.

So, we bishops and priests must step up and be more faithful and courageous. I promise you that regarding violations of priestly chastity, if I hear something, I'll say something to the proper person. And I need the same accountability from my brothers. No more going along to get along. No more looking the other way.

We clergy need contrition, but also your prayers, and a whole lot of truth to shine on the darkness and secrets of a small, but destructive, minority of us who have abused our power and ignored our Savior for too long.

When we speak of the "New Evangelization" and being "Intentional Disciples" these days, we must honestly admit to ourselves

that we bishops and priests are as much in need of such conversion as anyone else. The truth is, most priests are good men doing our best to serve you, but too many clergy don't know Jesus well enough. We need a renewed belief and hope that the Gospel life Jesus proclaims can really be lived out fully. And that not to live it means spiritual death for ourselves and all those we touch by our sin, while to live out Jesus' call sincerely, even if we sometimes fall through weakness, is to bring true joy for both the shepherds and the flock.

Introduce Fr. Preciano, Pastor St. Joseph, Malawi

Ask for new members of Malawi committee.