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Dear Parishioners and Friends of Saint Peter's

I write with a heavy heart to acknowledge the righteous anger I share with you as news of yet another cover-up of clerical sins washes over us with an undertow that seems to pull us further from our desired place of peace. Even though most of the Pennsylvania cases are old and many of the perpetrators deceased, I feel a sense of revulsion every time I consider the suffering of a child molested by anointed hands of a brother priest. I am overcome with internal fury that our bishops exempted themselves from the standards exacted for priests by the Dallas Charter in 2002, and thereby often failed to be transparent and accountable. More lamentable, is that some still don't seem to "get it" as the requests to "pray and fast" yet again fall on more and more deaf ears.

This is a tough time to be a Catholic and especially a priest or bishop. As one Catholic commentator said on Fox News Thursday night, "Catholics want blood!" And why shouldn't they? In 1987, Dominican Father Thomas Doyle, working as an adjunct staff member in the Nunciature (the Vatican Embassy to the USA) in Washington, wrote a report detailing the information pouring in about this problem. He was sidelined, the contents of his report, glossed-over. He told me this first-hand when I met him when we were both serving as Air Force Chaplains in 2000. Father Doyle later left the Air Force and frequently testified against the Church as a whistle-blower angering Church leadership to no end.

The sleeping giant had no choice but to awake as the Archdiocese of Boston's historic mishandling of abuse was placed front-page by the Boston Globe. This resulted in the 2002 Dallas Charter which, in essence, declared all accused clergy guilty until proven innocent. Given the reality of the existence of false allegations, it was a bridge too far in terms of fairness and legal protection for priests but deemed a necessary action by the bishops for their decades of leadership failure and cover up.

As a priest, I had hoped and prayed we had turned the corner. The Dallas Charter put in place reporting requirements and brought the laity into an oversight arena long-overdue. And indeed, the efforts and results are laudable. Most "new" cases are very old meaning they tend to be accusations against clergy ordained prior to the 1980s concerning allegations 40 or more years past. I believe children are very safe in the Catholic Church and our new priests tend to be much more emotionally, spiritually and psycho-sexually healthy than those formed at the height of the crisis (i.e. between 1950 and 1980).

Yet, the constant dribbling of bad news, the failure to be transparent, and the seeming good old boy system that has endured among the hierarchy consistently erodes our capacity to trust and to believe. Indeed, the words of Christ spoken about the religious leaders of his day so resonate,

“Do what they tell you but NOT what they do!” Hence, because of the sins of our institution, we who serve her must endure your suspicion.

For five years I have pastored the parish of Saint Peter’s, and thank God, have never heard an accusation against our clergy to include myself or our staff and volunteers. I believe our parish is healthy, growing and providing a spiritual oasis in our city. Nonetheless, we cannot evade the effects of grievous sin that so deeply affects the Body of Christ. Our Lord reminds us, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

You have every right to hold the Church accountable. Fraternal correction is scriptural and required much as our military academies’ honor codes hold those who fail to report honor violations as guilty as those who directly commit them. Let’s, however, do so with courtesy and respect lest our voices simply become indiscernible amongst the mob when our message needs to be clear and heard. You may write, email and speak with me directly or share your concerns with our parish council members who will, in-turn, convey them to me.

For those who want blood, Father Fryml and I can only offer our blood, sweat and tears for the sins of the priesthood. We pray with you, we cry with you and we endeavor with and for you to say “Enough!” I am not sure what else to do locally, in our parish. I am sure some may tell me. But I hope these words will help you to know how much your clergy share your disgust at what has been inflicted on the Bride of Christ by the sins of those we should have been able to trust.

It is time, my brothers and sisters, to end the rot, clean the wounds, and move forward so that we can be about our true mission of making disciples who will not be victimized by the very Church of Christ in which they have sought refuge and through which they seek eternal life.

Humbly and Fraternally,

Fr. Gary S. Linsky

The Very Reverend Canon Gary S. Linsky, V.F.
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