



THE PASTOR'S DESK

April 18, 2010 - What to Say About the Church

Dear Parishioners,

I've had a few people come up to me to tell me how difficult it is to be Catholic now. I'm sure many of us have experienced discomfort in conversations about the abuse situation. Maybe we have had experiences of people making fun of the Church or of the Holy Father. How do we respond? What do we say? What makes these questions so difficult is that we are upset ourselves and don't know enough to make a meaningful response.

Like a lot of you, I have been following the reporting and counter-reporting on the internet. It does seem that many media sources failed to properly check sources and published stories about the Holy Father that were, at best, exaggerated or, at worst, completely inaccurate. My best take on the matters with the Holy Father are best summed up by saying that he has been part of the solution, not part of the problem. From what I understand about the "Murphy" case in Milwaukee, the Holy Father (then Cardinal Ratzinger) was not involved until Fr. Murphy was near death and took no action against him because of that. In the case from Germany, it appears that then-Archbishop Ratzinger was not involved in that case, either. I don't know whether he should have been or not.

In writing this article, I realize that some of you who read this may yourselves have been the victims of abuse, whether at the hands of a priest or religious, or a teacher, coach, or relative. The publication of these stories may bring up very painful memories. There are many of you who may be questioning your faith, the Church, the Priesthood, perhaps God Himself. Others see this as a call for the Church to reform the Priesthood, perhaps doing away with celibacy or opening it up to women.

With all of these reactions out there, what can I tell you? The first thing we need to realize is that the world is fallen. This is no news to any of you. The crucifixion of Our Lord is the fullest revelation of the depths to which the world is fallen. But, it is also the fullest revelation of the depths of God's love for fallen man. Jesus died for all of our sins. This is both good news (salvation is open to all of us) and sobering news (*my* sins are that terrible, that ugly). The answer is the Resurrection of Christ. Because of this event, we now know that

sin does not have the last word. This is the foundation for the theological virtue of hope. Our ultimate hope is not in this world, but in the joy of the eternal Kingdom of God. We experience it here on earth in the Church. Freedom from sin and perfect communion happen in the Church, especially in the sacred liturgy, though it is hidden and, sadly, all too fleeting, sometimes lasting only until we reach the parking lot.

A theologian once said that the boundary lines of the Church run through every human heart. Whatever part of us responds to the grace of God and seeks to do His will, belongs to the Church. Whatever is selfish, prideful or sinful at all lies outside the Church. This is especially true for clergy. A priest may be in the Church only to the extent of his ministerial actions. A priest in mortal sin can still minister the sacraments validly. The grace of these sacraments can still sanctify the receiver. But, the priest himself is outside of the Church in terms of his own life and salvation.

In the end, the Church will be perfected as the bride of Christ, "without stain or wrinkle." This will occur for all those who die in the state of grace and who have been purified of inordinate attachments. We will all be free from sin and the effects of sin. This is how the Church will then be fully revealed as the Body of Christ. Until that day, we all struggle with sin, temptation, doubts, and fears.

So, what do you say to someone who criticizes the Church? Maybe, perhaps, just say that you love the Church and that you are praying for its sinful members and then ask the critic to pray for the Church, too.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**

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Congratulations to all who were confirmed this Saturday by His Excellency, Msgr. Barry Knestout. We had sixty four of our young people received the Sacrament of Confirmation. They have completed formation for 2 years and have even worked service hours to complete the program. Please keep them in your prayers as they continue their journey and growth with the church.