

Pastor's Corner

by Father Jon Vander Ploeg



The Church has a moral voice that calls to us. At times, there are issues or situations that make it difficult for some to hear that voice. In the coming months, we will look at some of the issues that are often unknown, controversial, or misunderstood with regard to the Catholic Faith.

Today, we will address the topic of clergy sexual abuse. This crisis has caused immense damage, not only for those who are victims of the abuse, but also for those whose faith has been damaged by the reality of it and the way in which it has been handled.

The majority of the cases that come up now are often from decades ago. For many, the voice of the Church has been muffled by the failure of certain members and leaders within the Church to step forward in appropriate ways when the information became public more than ten years ago starting in Boston.

The reporting of this issue has itself been controversial and, at times, has seemed to garner disproportionate attention and skewed information by the media. There is some legitimate reason for this, in that there is rightly a higher expectation for members of the Church and, therefore, failure on their part deserves a spotlight. At times, though, this spotlight has been less than objective or evenhanded. Archbishop Chaput, who was recently appointed Archbishop of Philadelphia, dealt with this very directly while he was in Denver. When pressured to make public every record, his response was that he would be happy to oblige if the Denver Public School system did the same. His point, legitimately, was that, though even one situation of abuse is too many in any sector, the percentage of cases within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is equal to or lower than cases within other groupings of people in society. His point was well-taken, and the pressure stopped immediately.

Failure on the part of members of the Church should be dealt with justly, allowing light to shine on them for the purification of their sins. As Pope Benedict has said, the Church should be grateful for every situation where the light of Truth exposes darkness. It is indeed a gift that allows for true conversion. We should also pray for the victims of that failure on the part of members of the Church.

While this issue of failure by her members does indeed diminish how the Church's voice is heard by others, it does not diminish the Truth she proclaims. The failure on the part of some should not cause us to shrink from declaring that Truth in the world.

In the midst of these human failings, we want to have hope. The Church will endure as it has throughout the ages, and we can rely upon her teachings. Even in the midst of these more current difficulties, the number of men in the seminaries around the country has been increasing each year, and the quality of those men is very high. There are also increasing numbers of young women who are joining religious life. There are young people in the church giving of themselves to serve others in love.

Let us pray for all who have been wounded and impacted by the failure of others to act responsibly, and let us pray for the Church in her mission to bring God's love and mercy to all.