

Given the recent PA Grand Jury Report, which contains horrible, graphic details of the barbaric crimes of child sexual abuse at the hands of a despicable minority of clergy and the subsequent cover-ups at the hands of some bishops, some or even many Catholics have honestly considered leaving the Catholic Church. Some of you here today may have even considered this at the suggestion of family, friends, or co-workers and maybe some of you are still on the fence about this.

Although your presence here today speaks volumes about your Catholic faith and how strong, mature, and deep it is. And so I sincerely thank you for your beautiful faith and your perseverance in Christ.

As a priest, such evil crimes against children and their subsequent cover-ups make me sick to my stomach and infuriate me more than you know. And even if our faith is still intact, our horror and revulsion at these vile crimes and sins is also still intact. I have no doubt that our Lord Jesus sees and weeps over those Catholics who have left His Church as a result of the child sex abuse scandal just as He undoubtedly weeps and is infuriated over the crimes themselves. And so in light of

that—in today’s Gospel—which could not be *more providential*, Christ poses a powerful question to each of us: ***“Do you also want to leave?”***

In the context of today’s Gospel, this question is posed to the 12 Apostles shortly after many disciples decide to abandon and reject Jesus, all because of His controversial teaching on the Most Holy Eucharist, in which our Savior said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. ***For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.***”

Well for a religion and culture that strongly rejected cannibalism, this teaching seemed just too difficult for many of Jesus’ disciples, all of whom were of course devout Jews. And yet when Jesus asks the 12 Apostles if they too would like to abandon Him and leave, Simon Peter, the leader of the 12, responds to Jesus saying, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

Such beautiful words spoken by St. Peter. And yet ironically brothers and sisters, what happens when Jesus is later arrested and crucified? The *same* St. Peter who *just* affirmed his faith in Jesus as the Son of God *here, publicly denies Christ three times* later in the Gospel! And most, if not all of the 12 Apostles, for the possible exception of St. John, abandon Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And of course how can we forget Judas, the Apostle who selfishly betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver?

Certainly, given the horrific crimes of child sexual abuse by some clergy and the subsequent cover-ups, there have been a lot of “Judases,” if you will, in the Church. But the Holy Spirit wants to powerfully remind us today that we should *not abandon Jesus because of Judas!* This is a powerful statement that’s been going viral on social media and the internet in the last week or so and *it should*, because *it’s true!*

Now I’ve heard from many people this week who’ve been saying things like: “Father, I love God, I love Jesus but, I can’t stand this institutional, corrupt Catholic Church and I’ve lost all trust in the hierarchy of the Church!” Certainly, I would agree that some or

possibly many leaders of the church have serious credibility issues considering their abject failure in leadership and negligence when it came to confronting the evil of child sexual abuse, not to mention the cover-ups. And I would also agree that this moral corruption within the Church is repulsive, infuriating, and should be eradicated!

And yet, going back to the 12 Apostles, we see what the first hierarchy of the Church actually did: one of the Apostles Judas, explicitly betrayed Jesus, another, St. Peter, the hand-picked leader of the 12 Apostles publicly denied Jesus three times, and for the most part, the other 10 Apostles abandoned Jesus out of cowardice during His darkest hour. Clearly this behavior was wrong and horrible, but it did not change the fact that Christ still called these fallible, weak, and sinful men and established His Universal Church upon them!

Now please, for the love of God, don't misinterpret what I'm saying as some sort of defense, excuse, rationalization, or justification for what a disgusting minority of priests and bishops have done in the Church! Hopefully, you know me well enough to know that I would *never* excuse or defend such indefensible and evil behavior! What I *am*

saying is that *in spite* of the sinfulness and evil behavior of some of the Church's members and leaders, from the Apostles all the way down to our own day, the Catholic Church is *still the One True Church* founded and established by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself! And the scriptural and historical evidence for this is overwhelming!

For example, in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus says clearly and definitively: “you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build *my church*, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give *you* the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” In St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy, the Apostle to the Gentiles explicitly declares: “...you should know how to behave in the household of God, *which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.*” In Luke 10:16, our Lord Jesus explicitly identifies Himself with His Church telling His disciples, who were the nascent Church: “*Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.*”

Lastly, today's second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which should *never* be interpreted as some sort of "divine endorsement" of male chauvinism or misogyny. No, rather the letter indicates Christ's intimate relationship with His Church—Christ is the Eternal Head of the Church, which is also His beloved Bride. And so just as a husband and wife are intimately one in marriage, so also Christ is intimately One with His Bride the Church.

Now like Christ, the Church is both human and divine. Yet *unlike* Christ, the human nature of the Church is imperfect, weak, fallen, and prone to sin and *obviously does* sin and commit moral evil. And so we should *never* attribute the sins and crimes of the human members of the Church to Christ Himself.

So brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus and His Catholic Church are indeed united as one! And I'm not even mentioning all of the historical and scriptural evidence for this, especially the testimony of the Church Fathers, who were those first Christian theologians, apologists, and philosophers who lived in the first 8 centuries immediately following Christ and His Apostles. The writings of the Church Fathers

are voluminous and their historical testimony is clear: the Catholic Church centered in Rome, where Sts. Peter and Paul were martyred, *is one the True Church* established by Christ in the 1st century AD.

So brothers and sisters, it stands to reason that *if we love Jesus*, then we will remain in the Church that *He* established, *despite* the sins and crimes of some of its members and leaders! We can't allow the sins and crimes *of others* to destroy *our* Catholic faith! And so as I've said it before and I'll say it again until I'm blue in the face: *there is no sin, crime, evil, or scandal, past, present, or future that could ever destroy, invalidate, or falsify the eternal, unchanging, and saving truths of the Catholic faith*. We must firmly root our entire Catholic faith in Christ and in the mission and identity of His Church.

Brothers and sisters, to be clear, there is *overwhelmingly more good* than evil within the Catholic Church and I see that on a daily basis as a priest, especially here at St. Ignatius. Sadly, we won't see all this daily goodness, love, compassion, and holiness within the Church on the front-page of newspapers or in the headlines of news stories.

Recently I watched an online commentary from a brother priest named Fr. Mike Schmitz from the Diocese of Duluth, MN on what's currently happening in the Church today. And Fr. Mike made a powerful statement that every Catholic at this moment in history needs to hear. He said, "Now's *not* the time to *leave* the Church, now's the time to *lead* the Church!" Brothers and sisters, this is so incredibly true. *Now more than ever*, the Church needs you! *We need the laity to step up and lead!* We need your leadership, your example, your demands for justice, accountability, authentic change, and meaningful reforms that ensure that our children will be safe and that the vile and barbaric crimes of child sexual abuse will never happen again in Christ's Church! The Lord is calling each of us personally by name to help lead the Church at this dark moment in Her history. Our Lord Jesus is calling us to lead the Church by example, by our own holiness, and by our practical demands and zeal for reform, renewal, and purification.

As we prepare to receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, our Lord who is the Savior of the human race and the Divine founder and Eternal Head of the Catholic Church, let's beg our Lord for

the grace to cooperate with Him in purifying and renewing His Church,
knowing that now is *not* the time to *leave* the Church, but rather now is
the time to *lead* the Church.