

Well you certainly don't need me to tell you that we're living in turbulent and tumultuous times, especially in the Church Herself, given the presence of horrible scandals and crimes, mistrust, moral confusion, and a sense of betrayal. I feel like every time we read a newspaper or go online, there's something new and devastating. And trust me brothers and sisters, I do not want to be a "doom and gloom" priest, let alone sound like one. I wish I could come up here and just talk about happy, positive, good things, but I would be so *personally tone-deaf and out-of-touch* if I didn't openly and honestly acknowledge what's currently happening in our beloved Church.

So we have one of two options in response to all the dysfunction and conflict within the Church today. And these two options are presented to us by the Lord Himself in today's Liturgy of the Word. First, we can either be like the Israelites and the crowds in the First Reading and the Gospel today and simply complain, moan, be bitter and negative go on about how horrible things are or seem to be.

*Or* we can heed the words of our Lord through St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians in today's second reading: "you must no longer live as the

Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. That is not how you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, *as truth is in Jesus, that you should put away the old self of your former way of life*, corrupted through deceitful desires, *and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth.*”

Brothers and sisters, yes, practical steps and decisive actions need to be taken and effective, substantive new policies and measures need to be implemented for the sake of justice and reform in response to the latest scandals in the Church. But *ultimately*, the solution to all of our problems in the Church, past, present, and future *is and has always been personal holiness—sainthood*, which is defined by a total transformation in Christ, a new life of virtue and love, and a firm rejection of sin and evil.

Let’s be clear about something: what’s at the root of all our current problems and scandals within the Church is nothing other than sin—moral evil. So if we want to fight evil and sin in the Church, then we must fight it first in our own lives! If we truly want to build a holy

Church, then we must allow Christ to *first make us holy*—to purify and sanctify *our own lives first!* And for the record brothers and sisters, in spite of all the terrible scandals and crimes we hear about in the news media, there is still *overwhelmingly* more goodness and holiness in the Church than there is sin and evil. I see that on a daily basis, just here in our own parish.

It's only in *first* embracing *personal* conversion, repentance, and transformation in Christ, will we *then see an even greater sanctity and holiness on a larger scale within the Church.* Holiness in the Church begins with you and me! The purification and renewal of Christ's Church begins with you and me—with *our own* purification and renewal in Christ! And reform of the Church on a large scale *must begin* with an ongoing personal reform of our lives—we must reject sin and live according to the moral teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church, which are *always still valid, true, and good*, regardless of whether or not some Church leaders live and abide by them. *Hypocrisy* never undermines the moral teachings of Christ's Church. Rather hypocrisy *only* undermines the hypocrites themselves. Remember, *the Truth is*

*the Truth*, regardless of what anyone else says or does, and that especially applies to the moral teachings of Christ's Church, especially the beautiful teachings on human dignity and sexuality, all of which are rooted in reason, love, and goodness.

Throughout history, when His Church experiences dark times, suffering, upheaval, scandal, corruption, etc., our Lord Jesus always calls saints, holy men and women, to respond to His grace, rise up in courage and humility and reform, renew, and strengthen His Church so that She may be continue to be a beacon of faith, hope, and love in a darkened world. It's through the saints that Jesus purifies, renews, and strengthens His Church so that She remains faithful to Her mission and identity to teach, govern, and sanctify in Christ's holy name.

Just this past Tuesday, we celebrated the feast day of our patron Saint, St. Ignatius of Loyola, who was truly a great man and reformer within the Church during one of the darkest periods of the Church's history in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. St. Ignatius of Loyola didn't reject the Catholic faith in response to all of the problems and threats facing the Church. Rather, he allowed Christ to transform him. Ignatius responded

to Christ's invitation to new life—a new life of holiness that would help reform, renew, and strengthen the Church so that She could fulfill the sacred mission entrusted to Her by Christ Himself.

So in response to all the problems in the Church, let's stop whining, complaining, and moaning about it. ***Rather, let's actually do something about it!*** Let's cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit and work and advocate for justice and meaningful and practical reforms so that such horrible scandals never happen again. ***But most importantly, let's become saints!*** Let's actively respond to God's grace, poured out to us through prayer and the sacraments, most especially through the Most Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life Who is Jesus Himself! Let's boldly and joyfully live our Catholic faith in its fullness, in all of its truth, goodness, and beauty! Let's rise up, answer Christ's call to holiness, and renew and purify the Church in cooperation with our victorious Savior Who pours out His Holy Spirit upon us!

Blessed Pope Paul VI, famously said in 1975 that “Modern man listens more willingly to ***witnesses than to teachers***, and if he does listen to teachers, ***it is because they are witnesses.***” Brothers and sisters, our

Lord Jesus is calling each of us by name to be joyful and courageous witnesses of the Gospel—to be saints and authentic reformers within the Church! This is our calling—this is our task at this specific moment in history—let us joyfully answer the call of Christ! Empowered by the Bread of Life, our Lord Jesus Himself, Who satisfies every hunger and every thirst, let us move forward and persevere with great faith, hope, and love, knowing that in Christ, we can do all things!