

Every priest I know is asking “when will it end,” knowing full well that “sin & human weakness” never really end, at least in this life time.

We talk among ourselves, we look at you and wonder what you might be thinking, we overhear bits and pieces of conversations in restaurants...all revolving around the scandals being reported in parts of the U.S. & the world.

Such predators sicken us all, and I'm not sure which ones disturb me more: the priests involved in these crimes of broken trust & shattered vows, OR those who hid them from public view?

But just when the press has seemed to tire of reporting these scandals, the movie “Spotlight,” a movie about the horrifying scandals in Boston, won an Oscar for the best picture of the year.

Don't get me wrong, these horrible events had to be reported, especially since local Catholic officials tried to keep these scandals secret, but sometimes I fear that we Catholics can lose perspective as to what the Church is all about. And so along these lines, I would like to quote Sam Miller, a successful Jewish business from Cleveland, who wrote an article on this subject some years ago. I can't recall where I first discovered it, but I ask you to be patient and allow me to quote from it.

He wrote: “Why would newspapers carry on a vendetta on one of the most important institutions that we have today in the United States, namely the Catholic Church”

Do you know that the Catholic Church educates 2.6 million students every day at the cost to that Church of 10 billion dollars and a savings to the American taxpayer of 18 billion dollars? These students go on to graduate studies at the rate of 92 %.

And the Catholic Church has a non-profit hospital system of 637 hospitals, which account for 1 out of 5 hospital beds in the U.S. today. Many of those hospitals, like our own Holy Cross Hospital (of happy memory) were in rural areas where little medical help was otherwise provided.

But the press is vindictive and trying to totally denigrate in every way the Catholic Church in this country. They have blamed the disease of pedophilia on the Catholic Church, which is as irresponsible as blaming adultery on the institution of marriage.

Let me give you some figures that Catholics should know and remember. For example, 12% of the 300 Protestant clergy survey admitted to sexual intercourse with a parishioner; 38% acknowledged other inappropriate sexual contact in a study by the United Methodist Church; 41.8% of clergy women reported unwanted sexual behavior.

Meanwhile, 1.7(the lowest figure) to 4%(the highest figure) of the Catholic clergy has been found guilty of pedophilia while 10% of the Protestant ministers have been found guilty of pedophilia. This is not only a Catholic problem.

A study of American priests showed that most are happy in the priesthood and, if given the choice, would choose to be priest once again.

Sam Miller finishes his article with a challenge: Walk with your shoulders high and your head higher. Be a proud member of the most important non-governmental agency in the U.S.” And that quote ended his article.

Some years back, the archbishop of San Francisco pointed out that of the 124 cases of child abuse reported in the city the previous year, only one was a priest and he was the only one who made the front page of the local newspaper.

You must believe that that this disease is not everywhere in the Catholic Church anymore than it is only a problem within the Catholic church—80% of child abuse takes place in the home, often by an extended family member; that having been said, I do believe that you have given us your trust & so when we betray that trust, our actions are more reprehensible than others who have hurt innocent & defenseless children.

But it is must also be said that there are those who violently dislike the Church for her moral & dogmatic teachings & have used these sad episodes to paint a distorted picture of Catholicism.

And so let's go back a bit; again not as a justification, but in search of a context. Scandal has been with the Church from its' earliest moments and throughout its' 2000 year history.

We must look at this and any scandal in light of faith in Jesus Christ who, after all, left His Church in imperfect hands; then & now, the Church has always been filled with sinners, people in need of forgiveness.

Recall that Jesus handpicked his apostles, then presented them to the Father in prayer, showed them his miraculous powers to heal & raised people from the dead in their presence...& yet with all these experiences, one of these chosen ones exercised his free will(or as scripture says: allowed Satan to enter into him) & betrayed Jesus. And so right from the first 12 Apostles that Jesus himself chose, one was a terrible traitor.

If people had just looked at the struggling Christian community by only looking at Judas, would there be a Christian today??? People would have probably thought: "If Judas saw Jesus as a fake, then he's probably a fake."

But instead of focusing upon the one who betrayed Jesus, the disciples focused on the other 11 Apostles & it is on account of their work, their preaching, the miracles they observed, their belief in Jesus, shown through their martyrdom, that Christianity is alive today.

History is about headlines; history rarely, if ever, records, the quiet events of holiness & grace. We all know holy people, people known to God & to their family & friends, for their persistent acts of kindness...but those lives will never make the news.

Unfortunately, people whose goodness is hidden from view are often pushed aside by the evil that so often does come into view, but as St. Paul says: where sin abounds, grace does more abound.

And so that the church is filled with sinners isn't really news.

But the church is so much more than that, and don't let anyone try to tell you differently. I am unaware of any institution that has lasted 2000 years & as with even more recent institutions, that hasn't a need to clean up its.'

I can assure that steps are being taken to address this & other scandals.

Are these steps too slow in coming: yes, of course they are but the Church always moves slowly; The reforms are now in place in every diocese & among all religious Orders in the U.S.

Admittedly sometimes it is tough to be a Catholic today. But is also great to be a Catholic today because as a Church, I believe that we have responded to the call to holiness, issued by Jesus Christ Himself.

The monumental worldwide work of the Church is not aimed at conversion so much, but in helping people live better lives, through our hospitals, schools, orphanages, homes for the aged and so many other ministries. Think Mother Theresa.

After all, we have more people serving in mission areas than any other group & they are bringing life & hope & material resources to people who have none.

Some of those who have come to value the church in its' work & holiness are people who have attended our RCIA classes from September & today are undergoing the second scrutiny; these steps towards full union with Catholicism take place during the 3rd, 4th, & 5th weeks of Lent and speak of a gradual conversion that takes place & so after the homily, they will leave in order to continue their studies together.

I need to warn you, however, that this journey into Catholicism may lead to some disapproval; you should know that the last acceptable prejudice allowed in intellectual circles is against us Catholics, should this happen to you, recall the Beatitude:

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you falsely because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great.

In today's gospel, Jesus and his disciples run into a man who has been blind from birth; the healing of this man is described in 3 short verses.

Actually more emphasis is placed upon what follows the miracle than on the miracle itself. The miracle is simply a sign that something deeper is going on here It sets the stage for this deeper event, a conversion event.

In John's gospel, Jesus is seen as knowing our needs before we even ask for help, before we're even aware of our own need for help. John believes that we are sitting in darkness and don't even know it.

He takes his time in developing the story. He notes that the DISCIPLES look at the blind man and take this as an opportunity to discuss the theological problem of origin of sin.

JESUS looks at the blind man and takes this as an opportunity to heal him without even being asked for a miracle; still, he restores his sight and sends him on his way.

It would be too easy for us to focus upon the blindness of the Pharisees in this story, but the truth of the matter is that we too are blind.

Those who think that they know it all are the ones who don't realize that they cannot see at all.

During Lent, let us look at our own blindness: after all, only those who can recognize their own blindness can see, only those who recognize their own weakness can become strong, and only those who realize their own sinfulness can be forgiven.

There is a contest between humility and pride, between open and closed minds, between light and darkness.

Wisdom is the reward for the humble; ignorance is the outcome of the arrogant.

The blind man in the gospel confessed his ignorance 3 times; he started out in darkness and then moved into light.

The more knowledge that we have, the more that we'll be condemned if we do not acknowledge the good that we see. The blind man's parents knew that their son was healed, but did not believe in Jesus; his family and friends knew that he was healed, but did not believe in Jesus; those who saw him begging at the Temple knew that he was healed, but did not believe in Jesus.

Humility, an open mind, a desire to live in the light made all the difference in the blind man's life. Our blind spots are fixable. God continuously says: fix them now; but we will only fix them if we truly want to see.

Sadly, as we observe in today's gospel, some people choose blindness over sight, darkness over light, sin over forgiveness. For those of us not wishing to remain blind, Lent is a time for our own self-examination; a time to discover what our own personal courage allows us to see about ourselves.