

Blemished

My face is a mess. Overexposed for years in the California sun, it now looks like rugged desert terrain, baked red by heat. I am undergoing a harsh chemical treatment that surfaces precancerous blotches. Hidden no more, these sores must face the light, scab, and fall away with the advent of new skin.

Vanity aside, I am glad to be monstrous for a time. How else will I heal?

Our Church's face has become monstrous too. I tremble at the deposing of now ex-Cardinal McCarrick whose charismatic persona charmed and seduced countless young men. Everyone loses here. A recent book on praying for priests begins with the author—a devout woman--gushing over McCarrick's nearly perfect homily as he kicked off the Year for Priests in 2009. How devilish the divided heart; how deadening for the devout.

So we pray. For this convert, it means laying aside childish dreams of the Church; it means looking at her through adult eyes, seeing her blemishes while beholding her underlying beauty. That takes work. I am convinced that we can discern the truth of sin, artfully dodged by big guys that we should be able to trust, while not allowing that sin to destroy our vision of what she can be. The truth: she needs our prayers and discernment. If I forsake her, she will suffer. I suffer too. Sick with sin—McCarrick's, mine, ours--I must spit up my waste and eat Jesus. Strange: at her ugliest, I need Jesus' presence from her more than ever. We are one. Head and body cannot be split.

What do we pray? First for sheep partaken of by shepherds: may the abused be respected, heard, and restored. By a miracle of mercy, might the house of horrors become for the wounded a home that heals?

Secondly, discipline for those who abused. The main way we liberate healing for the abused is by verifying that in truth (s)he was abused, the abuser committed a criminal act, and both the Church and the state are holding him accountable for what he did. For once I agree with the NY Times editorial board: 'Priests who are credibly shown to abuse children should be thrown out of the pulpit and identified to civil authorities; bishops who cover their actions should be laicized and exposed, and the order to do so must come from the pope.'

We in Kansas City have the backhanded honor of being the first diocese in world history to have its bishop investigated by a grand jury for mishandling a priest mucking around in kiddy porn (now in jail). Though good Bishop Finn wasn't fired by the pope, he was compelled to resign in 2015. Our own diocese served as a testing ground for the state refining the Church. Let us pray that the Church will act before the court must! We can pray that the pope will unite the global Church to discipline abusive shepherds and their protective bishops. Anything less re-wounds abused sheep. No more chatter on the horrors of abuse. Action alone speaks now.

Yet we have a deeper problem that includes but is not limited to child endangerment: pastors who forsake vows of chastity and engage with consensual adults. What's the big deal, you ask? They're only human, eh? Does it really hurt anyone? Consider this spiritual incest--a father making a son or daughter his lover. Is it not obvious how this undermines our trust and moral fortitude?

Scripture and Church teaching hold us to holiness--a high standard for happiness in the sexual realm. Shepherds who sidestep their own vows mock this standard—chastity--and the Holy One. Sexually divided priests defile us all by rendering chastity an option when it is God's call upon every human being.

So third, let us pray for the grace of repentance for our shepherds. Pray for safe opportunities for them to return to the One who can restore hearts and boundaries. Prayer frees us to act and to hope again. After all, we are conversing with the Lord of all! That action may well begin with our turning back to Him where we have grown dim and disillusioned, compromised in our own right.

And we can pray with discernment. Let's look at the blemished face of Jesus' bride and love her as 'gently as doves, as wisely as serpents' (Matt. 10:16).

As we do, we can be assured that God hears our prayers and will act. After all, He 'gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, to present her to Himself as a radiant bride, without spot or wrinkle or any blemish, holy and blameless.' (Eph. 5: 25b, 26)

Please take time to watch our new video and become '[Chaste Together](#).'