

Grieving the Divides

In her face, I witnessed my sorrow and somehow could feel it. My friend conveyed simple pain over her (natural) father's ongoing failures, a man she wanted to love but could not trust. All she could summon was pity. And now grief as she witnessed him unraveling before her eyes.

Strange. Since this prayer/fast for a Church shackled by abuse, I have been overcome by grief, a loss I cannot shake. Outrage over cover-ups and talky inaction has given way to disappointment, an abiding sadness for her, this Church, MY Church for whom I left all other churches in order to know her more. For she is the first and last and most coherent champion of a culture of life for persons-- from conception to childhood through puberty onto adulthood-- whose gendered gifts can become fruitful. And she has been taken hostage by a filthy few. Predators in the mercy pool have polluted the waters for many. I grieve. A recent survey claims up to one-third of all American Catholics are considering leaving the Church.

Yet she is still my Church, my champion, founded on the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as her cornerstone (Eph. 2: 20). Called and capable of integrating lives, her abusers have divided them. I recall a conversation with a young man cut down in his most formative years as a pre-adult by a former colleague of mine who, in the true meaning of diabolical (Gr. 'to tear apart'), divided this boy right down the middle. Before jail time, a wolf tore into this sheep and rendered his body alien to him, a foe. In our meeting, the young man acted vagrantly. Instead of helping him secure a masculine home, that minister made him destitute.

So I grieve. I cannot give that young man back his dignity. He distrusts me as much as he does his predator. Unable to make him 'right', I grieve. I grieve for all the men who as teenagers were divided by priests. According to the John Jay Report, 3-6% of American priests allegedly abused 11,000 children, 78% male teens, between 1950 and 2002.

I ask God to make my grief good. Maybe He will do so by channeling inaction into prayer. I can lament along with the Psalmist: 'We have become the reproach of our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us...Do not hold our iniquities against us; may Your compassion come quickly, for we are brought very low.' (PS 79: 4, 8)

And we can ask Jesus to raise senior shepherds who are lion-hearted, courageous in their discipline of spiritual sons under their charge. 1 Samuel 2-4 describe better than I can the consequence of fathers not curbing their kids' bad behavior. If you recall, Eli's sons acted immorally in the temple, neither respecting God nor the people they served (1 S 2:12, 22); these young men did not heed their father's warning and kept on defiling God's house. As a result, God withheld His blessing from the Israelites and they suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Philistines (4:10), including the death of Eli's sons.

Swift discipline helps us all. How else can trust be regained? As we pray for its outworking, we do

well to remember that Jesus created this Church in His image, not ours. I'm grateful. A visiting priest joyfully asked us: 'Aren't you glad your ways are not God's?' Utterly, I thought. This padre grabbed my attention, held it.

Jesus' way for the Church isn't mine. This same priest reminded us that 'faith was imputed to Abraham as righteousness who believed even though he did not quite understand what was happening.' He closed: 'Aren't you grateful for the riches of our Church? Aren't you glad to be Catholic?' Taken aback, I saw the light of Jesus beaming on his 80-something-year-old face and I smiled, nodded within then returned to prayer for her healing.

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