

Little Monsters

The ongoing outing of men acting badly (Les Moonves of CBS, new evidence against Weinstein, Cardinal McCarrick and his cronies, hundreds of American priests who abused in the second half of the 20th century) may tempt us more to disgust than self-examination. I refer here to my brothers who may not be big players in the Catholic hierarchy or media but who are familiar with sexual disintegration---ways we have squandered our powers of life and love.

The cycle is all-too-familiar: high stress, low significance, mounting pain, decreasing words, sensational pleasure, greater shame, riskier business, escalating shame, huge-consequences-if-caught, SILENCE. Until exposed. Then the glare of public scorn burns off hope of restoration.

We may never have coerced another person sexually but our sins of omission and commission have doubtlessly wounded others. And fractured our dignity. We thank God that we are not felons yet we share in the wound of corruption common to men, disordered desire which results from mistaking random sexual release with power. Then the delusion: 'it's what I need', or '(s)he likes it.'

This is especially tragic when paired with religion. Many of the abusive priests were orthodox in their understanding of purity. They just failed to become what they believed. Mastered by lust and shame, they learned to compartmentalize, to live elsewhere, to tune out the lament of a dying conscience and conjure an unreal world. Then religion becomes part of the defense against reality. I dreamt last night of a priest who wrapped himself tightly in scholarly and spiritual vestments; instead of guiding or cleansing him, these garments protected then mummified him, hastening a shameful death. 'If religion does not make you better, it can make you a whole lot worse', to quote C.S. Lewis.

What good purpose can these monstrous sins have? They can reveal our little monsters, men, and invite us to do urgently and persistently what Weinstein and Moonves and McCarrick never did: we can expose ourselves before the throne of grace and receive grace to help us' (Heb. 4:16) so that our little monsters stay small and cease to govern us. Rather, we tame them, and learn to direct our sexual energies in alignment with the dignity afforded us by God and His friends.

We must be the first to confess our sins, to reveal our monsters before we are silenced by shame and dwell in darkness. Presumption and pride fall away, and the narrow way which leads to life becomes lit for our brothers. That is precisely what we as men accomplish together in Living Waters. We live in the light of mercy for 6 months of daily accountability; connection rather than shameful isolation begin to define our lives.

In the shaking, the exposure of monstrous things, we can fall on the Rock before it falls on us.