

Unflinching Mercy for the Abused

‘The beauty of the cathedral does not oppose the cross but is its fruit.’ - Cardinal Ratzinger

The other morning in prayer I was startled by the image of a priest opening his vestments in a cathedral and abusing a boy. The act was as ugly as the building was beautiful. I felt rage: the boy was sacrificed on the altar of another’s perversion, and this, before the Lord! Ordained to protect, the priest destroyed. And the man over him—a bishop—protected the building, not the boy.

I wanted to race from the image and lose myself in mystery. But I could not. I asked God why and He seemed to say: ‘That boy relives the nightmare constantly. I give you a share in it. Money cannot heal him; His restoration hinges on whether or not he is believed and that priest defrocked, along with any bishop who covered for him.’

I could not flinch and turn away from the boy’s nightmare. To be unflinching means ‘to not be frightened of, or not to not try to avoid something dangerous...to look and describe something directly.’

I vented my anger in prayer and asked for justice to be served at the recent US Bishops’ gathering in Baltimore; I prayed for ways that the bishops might censure themselves (apparently, this question will be taken up by a global gathering of bishops in February.) Please pray for this crucial issue: unless bishops are disciplined, there is no restoration for victims.

I realized that day was the Feast of the Lateran Basilica, one chance a year for the Church to honor the cathedral of the pope in Rome, a mere building but one that conveys an essential about this Church built on apostles and prophets who point us to the new Jerusalem. I felt conflicted; in our abuse crisis, I am tempted to disdain the Church for what I fear hides beneath her ancient creeds and cloaks.

And yet this rather minor feast has always been my favorite day of all. Why? As I reread the Scriptures—Jesus on fire for the temple, incinerating its robbers (John 2), and the river flowing from the temple to ‘make all things new’ (Ezek. 47), I remembered: this is the Church I love—zealous in truth, and boundless in its river of life flowing from the Cross at altar—the water levels rising and my friends and I growing as trees along the banks of this holy river, our fruit becoming food for the hungry, our leaves anointed to heal the broken (v. 12).

Might this be the hour, O holy and merciful Jesus, when You re-enter Your house and expel those who crush the most vulnerable then lie about it? Might You then stir the waters and release a greater flood of healing for those most in need of it? May those devoured by robbers in Your house be restored by Almighty mercy.

May we not cease to pray and act until this is accomplished for the abused. Through the fruit of

Your suffering—the healing flood rising in our midst—might the beauty You intend for Your house be restored, first for them then for all.

'I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give Him no rest, until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of all the earth.'

(Isaiah 62: 6, 7)

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