

HOW CAN YOU STAY IN SUCH A CHURCH?

How to respond to friends, family, and others

In the wake of the sex abuse scandal, many people — especially the media — are asking, “How can you stay Catholic?”

A recent CBS poll revealed that 88 percent of Catholics report that the scandal has had no effect on their dealings with priests. 82 percent say it will not affect their Mass attendance, 79 percent say it will have no effect on donations, and 87 percent say that it will have no effect on their children’s involvement in Church activities.

These statistics may come as a shock to the secular media or the general public, but they aren’t a huge surprise to the faithful who know that they are not Catholic because of the perfection of the people they meet at church or the priests they know. Far from it. Catholics aren’t surprised by sin. We are often saddened by it, appalled by it, and disgusted by it, but we’re really not that surprised.

What we are surprised by is that, despite the sin that is undoubtedly present in our hearts and in the Church itself, Jesus Christ continues to find ways to powerfully change lives and challenge the world through the Church He founded.

We are surprised by the breathtaking way Christ touches our hearts through his sacraments, nourishes us through the Eucharist, and, through his grace, empowers us — despite our individual and collective weakness — to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable with the Gospel of Life. It is this surprising encounter with Christ that keeps the faithful faithful. Despite our brokenness and the brokenness within the Church, we believe that we are founded upon the rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18).

THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PASTOR: We Are All Hurting

As I reflected a couple of weeks ago in my homily on the current abuse scandals, we are in a difficult time in the Catholic Church as we face the latest reality of evil in our world: a world that we as Christians are not immune from, as our Lord warned many times during His ministry 2000 years ago. The revelations of the last few weeks are another “wake-up call” that the battle between good and evil is a real one; that sin is real; that the pursuit of holiness is not easy; that Satan does exist; and that the evil one will try to do anything to undermine the mission of the Church to bring souls to Christ. Because the Church, and the Eucharist, and the priests who confect the Eucharist, and the laity who exercise their mission to evangelize the culture, are all such essential avenues to Heaven, Satan will try all he can to attack at the heart of God’s work on this Earth.

Indeed, Satan has attacked. **But we must not succumb. We must rally all the more around the source of our strength: the Lord Jesus Christ.** And as we do so, especially in the Holy Eucharist and in our personal and collective prayer, we can and must be honest with Jesus about our reactions, our feelings, our questions, our frustrations, our anger at the fallout of Satan’s attack. Indeed, as a pastor and as a Christian, I have many of my own, as I ponder the recent crisis. The recent events hit home for me as a pastor in that they painfully remind me of some past experiences of how broken our culture is with its confusion over sexuality and the dignity of the human person. I have personally, in my past ten years as pastor of multiple parishes, had to handle no less than half a dozen instances of inappropriate behavior (or accusations thereof) involving parishioners, staff, or even (in one instance) a visiting contractor to a parish. Handling these cases immediately and firmly was never easy for me, but it was essential to protect those in my pastoral care. These cases confronted me with the reality of the work that needs to be done in our larger culture regarding restoring a healthy understanding of sexuality and human dignity.

So, as I look at the current crisis in the Church, as a priest who has had to deal with these issues, as a disciple of the Lord myself, and as a “second-career” who has worked in private-sector organizations, I am wrestling, too, with many questions and frustrations about our hierarchy. While most bishops are good leaders, why didn’t more exercise the strong leadership and the “fraternal correction” that they should have? Why weren’t appropriate procedures put into place back in 2002 (during the “first” scandal) to handle cases against bishops, as were put into place against deacons and priests? And so on. It’s important that, as we come to Jesus for refuge and strength after being hurt in the spiritual battle against Satan, **that we are honest with our questions, individually and collectively, and to support each other in that we are not alone, and to keep focused on our overall mission of discipleship and evangelization.**

There are some reasons for hope, to keep us from despair. It seems as though, finally, more of our bishops are “getting it”. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the current head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has courageously called for investigations into the very questions I raised above, which no doubt will be discussed at the annual November meeting of our nation’s bishops. Our bishops need our prayers as more learn the meaning of leadership.

But we need more than just the hierarchy to take action and to get on the ball. **We need the ENTIRE Church to join in the battle against Satan and to take action as we come to Jesus for healing and strength: as lay women, as lay men, as parents, as parishioners.** There are some positive initiatives underway and resources available to help. I encourage, for example, all **lay women** to voice their concerns with the thousands of others by co-signing the letter to Pope Francis at catholicwomensforum.org. **Men, we need you as well** to call our hierarchy to strong, manly leadership. Voice your concerns and join in the fasting that other lay men are committing to, by co-signing a similar letter to Pope Francis at catholicmenunited.org. For **parents and all parishioners**, there are a number of helpful resources and guides to try to deal with the current crisis (from popular speakers like Bishop Barron, Fr. Mike Schmitz, and lay Catholics) that will soon be listed on the home page of the Diocese of Columbus. Check them out. One of them is especially well-done, and I have reprinted it here in today’s bulletin. **And finally**, in the spiritual battle against evil, we all need to heed the call for **intense prayer and fasting** in the weeks and months ahead that Pope Francis is urging.

Together, let’s not give up, but no matter how difficult the battle against evil and Satan gets, let’s stay focused on Jesus Christ, and remain confident that He is, and always will be, the Victor! St. Michael the Archangel, Pray for Us!

Coping With The Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis

How do we keep the faith amid such betrayal? How do we talk to our kids about this? Here's what you need to know

By Gregory Popcak – from *Catholic Digest: Faith & Life* – August 17, 2018

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Catholic Digest Editor's Note: This content originally appeared in a July/August 2010 special issue of *Catholic Digest* about the clergy sex abuse crisis. As the Church confronts another crisis, we hope readers find the information spiritually helpful.

It's getting harder and harder to watch the news. It seems that almost every day, a new story emerges about priest sex abuse or cover-up in the Catholic Church. It's unconscionable. Words can't describe the disgust, frustration, pain, betrayal, and anger many Catholics feel. It's enough to make a person give in to feelings of despair or even to wonder whether it's worth remaining Catholic.

It's natural to experience these feelings, and the outrage they spark can lead to important changes that will hopefully cure the infection in the Body of Christ and prevent similar wounds from happening in the future. But along the way, it is possible for people to be so frustrated that their faith doesn't survive to appreciate the cure. Here are some suggestions to make sure this doesn't happen to you.

Ask yourself: "What do I believe in?" Researchers who study the psychology of faith know that people belong to a church for different reasons. Some people go to church because they like the people they find there. Others go because they feel comforted. These are fine reasons to go to church, but they tend to result in weak ties to a faith community. *What happens to my faith when the people I believe in let me down? What do I draw comfort from when my faith community is the source of so many uncomfortable feelings?*

In these times, it's important to remember that Scripture cautions us against putting our faith "in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no salvation" (Psalm 146:3). People are always imperfect. They will always let us down. We cannot belong to the Church because its people are always good, because, unfortunately, they are not. If we belong to the Church, it must be because it is where we most intimately encounter Christ in the sacraments.

Those who take this opportunity to refocus on their connection with Christ in the sacraments will experience the scandal as painful, but not as faith-shattering. They, like the early Apostles, will look at the face of Christ in the midst of the crisis. When He asks, "Will you also leave?" they will say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life!" (John 6:68).

Pray. Prayer is critical to maintaining our faith through crisis. By all means, be honest with God about the frustration you feel that his Body has been broken in so many horrible ways. Tell God about your frustrations with Church leadership, about your anguish for the abuse victims, and about your own sadness that your faith is being challenged in these ways. But ask God to help you grow in love for Him and for his Church. Ask Him to strengthen you for the journey ahead, that you might be able to be an encouragement to the many faithful priests who are so deeply hurt by the failings of their brothers, and a source of healing and compassion for the victims of the abuse.

Aid in the healing. In response to the crisis, the pope and many faithful bishops and priests have called for everyone to be more faithful and even to do penance. This often results in the laity getting more than a little irritated. "Why should I do penance? I didn't do anything wrong!"

The reaction is understandable but, I think, misguided. Doing penance for your personal sins and strengthening your commitment to living out the truth of the Church in your everyday life is not the same as participating in some false claim of personal complicity in the scandal. Think of it this way: When your body gets sick, sometimes that sickness can spread to other parts of the body that were previously unaffected. Or sometimes, your body might get a secondary infection that preys on your weakened state.

When the Church calls people to repent and be more faithful, she isn't saying it's your fault that some priests abused kids and some bishops covered it up. She is saying that she needs your help making the whole Body of Christ as healthy as possible without falling prey to secondary spiritual "infections" (like despair, hopelessness, loss of faith) so that the Church can concentrate its efforts on healing the part of the Body that is hurting the most. When we commit to our spiritual health regimen (prayer, fasting, service to others, penance), we help the Church focus on the healing that needs to be done, and inspire others to greater spiritual health as well.

Get your facts straight. The secular press does a great service by exposing the sins of the Church. Even so, sometimes reporters simply do not have enough understanding of either theology or Church governance to get the story straight. Before you make any judgments about what is or isn't happening in the Church because of something you read in the paper or on the internet, check multiple sources (conservative and liberal, Catholic and secular) to get a better read on what's really going on.

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT THE SCANDAL

"Dad, Mom, why did priests hurt kids?" That's not a question any parent wants to face. Here are some suggestions for talking with children about sex abuse in the Church:

Ask questions. When your child asks a question about the scandal, before you answer, make sure to ask questions like, "What do you think about that?" And, "Can you tell me what you heard/ where you heard that?" Taking a moment to ask where kids are getting their information and assessing the conclusions they are coming to on their own is critical to formulating an effective response to their honest questions.

Let them lead. When you answer a child's question, ask if he or she has any other questions. Let the child lead the discussion so you know how much or how little you need to say to satisfy their concerns or curiosity.

Remind them that you will keep them safe. Remind your child that he or she doesn't have to worry. You will take care of them and keep them safe from any possible harm.

Remind them what we believe in. Just like grown-ups, kids need to remember that we don't believe in Father So-and-So or this particular congregation. Rather, we believe in Jesus Christ and his sacraments, especially the Eucharist that makes us one with Christ and maintains our life in Him. We are Catholic not because of people, but because of the Eucharist.