

Dear Friends:

As I accompany grieving families, and the caskets or urns containing the remains of their loved ones, from the church to the funeral car at the end of funeral Masses, the bells peal insistently, announcing for everyone news of great joy: Christ is risen! Frequently, on these solemn walks from the church to the coach, I wonder how we, as a Church, can simultaneously hold forth both the pain of grief and the joy of resurrection. Yet this is what we do, as a matter of faith, and though it may feel counter-intuitive, it is crucial that we try, in all situations, to be a people who accompany, strengthen, and reassure one another as we struggle to carry sorrow and yet hopefulness in our lives and in the heart of our Church.

This is true now, more than ever. As you may be aware from the last two weeks of news, there is renewed turmoil in the Church related to clergy sexual abuse. Just as the Archdiocesan bankruptcy settlement approval finally seems imminent, we now hear about the grand jury report in Pennsylvania, the allegations of abuse and negligence concerning former Cardinal-Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, and further demands for investigations against the Church in Minnesota.

I have heard some of you express anger, frustration, and bewilderment with the seemingly unrelenting torrent of negative news. For some, the experience approaches a sense of desolation, where we are left feeling mystified, helpless, and wondering if the very thing/person(s) we have depended upon deserve our continued trust and support. The questions that are much on the minds of many people: Why stay? Why continue as a Catholic?

I understand and share this frustration and sense of helplessness. I hope, though, that we can keep in mind that those who feel this most personally are the victims of sexual abuse, who carry the wounds throughout their lives. It is with them, and for them, that we bear some burden, however undeservedly, of the pain and despair wrought by the history of clergy sexual abuse, for *“when one member suffers, all suffer together.”* (1 Cor 12: 26.

In this Archdiocese, we have in the past four-plus years lived an experience of this reality that other parts of the country are only now beginning to deal with. Our experience, as painful as it is, can benefit others. I believe the safe-environment structures here, which we support and practice fully at St Timothy’s, and the people responsible for managing them, can and should be modeled by other dioceses throughout the country. They are as effective as any organization anywhere in the country, not just the Catholic Church. *“This is the cleanest Archdiocese in the country right now,”* attorney Jeff Anderson quoted in *Pioneer Press* July 20, 2018. All of us owe a debt of

gratitude to the hundreds of victims, whose persistence and courage in presenting claims, testimony, and lawsuits have created the impetus and the means to protect youth and vulnerable adults throughout our Archdiocese.

I will have more to report as the Archdiocesan bankruptcy process is approved; a development we hope is completed by the end of September. In the meantime, I wish to convey to all of you who feel this distress that your experience is known and acknowledged, and although that affirmation cannot remove the pain, I hope it helps us remember that we are to support one another, not just in good times, but also in the hard times. I too struggle at times with these questions, yet as one commentator recently said, "*If I am a member of the Church, it is because some people in the past did not say, 'I am done.'*" This is why I urge all of us at St. Timothy to even more passionately live out our faith and ministry to love and support each other and serve our community, setting an example for others.

The resurrection bells remind me with every funeral of God's irrevocable claim to accompany us in our suffering. So too do we, as a Church, need to accompany with sorrow and hope the victims of abuse in their pain, and one another in our struggles, as surely as we accompany those who grieve the death of a loved one. And though the larger part of this sorrow is borne by the victims, the renewed hope we share is an outcome of their commitment to find justice and healing. Often, in moments of testing, we struggle to give ourselves over to this transcendent reality, this strange, persistent claim that in the heart of this community of faith we will hear proclaimed a new life in the face of death, and hope through despair. I choose to trust that God in His great mercy will bring such healing grace to the victims, and to any of you who feel so deeply this betrayal of trust. And so may the peace of God, which holds within itself the only true power to heal, forgive, and reconcile, be with all of you, and most especially, with the many victims who with much suffering carry the effects of abuse. May God's blessing and peace be with them, and with all of you.

*Fr Joe*