

Dear Editor:

It was a critical scene, in a powerful tale. One of the most influential individuals the world has ever known, a man whose short life would transform all cultures, a being who would become the great manifestation of love in our world, was asking His disciples a very important question. “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

The men began to reply. Some answered by stating the names of prophets, some mentioned religious figures, others mentioned fathers of the Church. Jesus posed the question again, “But who do you say that I am?” And in that moment one man, perhaps the most flawed, most human of all the disciples, answered the question of Christ not by his sight, but by his faith. “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.”

Jesus Christ replied to Saint Peter with a phrase that has reverberated down from generation to generation, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the kingdom of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.”

So reads the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew. This passage, through the eyes of Catholics, is the Biblical foundation and cornerstone for the Roman Catholic Pope. For Catholics, Peter was the *prima Papum*, the first Pope.

Yet now the church that Christ gave to Peter, the church that has survived two thousand years of human weakness, the church that Catholics believe they possess, has fallen under attack not only from outside invasion, but also from internal corruption.

Beginning in 2002 with the discovery that a number of catholic priests had sexually abused young people in many different dioceses, it became known that several Bishops, knowing about this abuse, proceeded in reassigning these priests to other parishes. These sinful acts have given birth to the greatest crisis the American church has ever known.

With this crisis, a question has arisen. Does this scandal, does this sin, speak for the entire Catholic Church, leading us to the conclusion that Catholicism and its Pope are completely corrupt? Or can the flaws of a few corrupt men be seen as simply that?

Although these sexual attacks and abuses are nothing less than disgusting and inhumane, a distinction **MUST** be drawn between the everlasting grace of God, and the infinite flaw of man.

With this distinction in place we can move forward to answer this query. Over the next few weeks, I will be presenting a three-piece series, beginning with this editorial, that will aim to understand and examine the human flaws that caused these attacks, the power of the Catholic Priesthood, and the way that we approach religion itself, so that finally, we may be able to answer this critical question.

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of priests involved in the sexual abuse scandal were not pedophiles but in all actuality suffered from a disorder known as ephebophilia.

Although equally disgusting and wrong, this differs from pedophilia in the fact that pedophiles experience sexual preference to prepubescent children whereas ephebophilia indicates sexual preference to mid-to-late adolescents.

Now that we have developed a clear definition to what this problem is, we can begin to look at the problem itself.

In the Gospel of St. Mark, Christ speaks of what punishment will be endowed on those who sexually abuse children. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

We the church, like Christ, believe that there is no earthly penalty or castigation that we will be able to give to these men that will even begin to equal the punishment they deserve. Yet we, the church, are also a church of forgiveness and mercy.

In the same manner in which we, as Catholics, believe our God has completely forgiven us although we have transgressed against Him, we aim to completely forgive these priests even though they have embarrassed millions of Catholics across the world, cost the church billions of dollars in settlements, created inestimable damage to the church's reputation and, saddest of all, severely hurt and damaged many children and their families.

In the words of former Pope, Blessed John XXIII, "The church has always opposed...errors. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy, rather than that of severity."

The church has always had corrupt leaders! Even during the time of Christ there existed apostles that were not faithful to Him. Peter was constantly putting his foot in his mouth and embarrassing himself, and Jesus. The Gospel of Saint John vividly shows how Judas was consistently thinking of his own desires rather than God's. Yet there is a critical difference between these two men. One repented to man, one repented to God.

When Peter denied Christ three times during His trial and crucifixion, he soon thereafter pleaded to God for forgiveness. When Judas sold Jesus to the Pharisees, he sought redemption not from God, but from the very religious leaders that put a price on Christ's head. In the same breath, we can apply this to the Catholic priesthood. All men are flawed!

What separates a good priest from a bad priest? Is it the idea that good priests do not fail? No. Success, and the effectiveness of the priesthood lie in repenting to God. Holiness consists in taking up our crosses and following after our blessed Lord, no matter how many times we fall. This is shown in the way Christ took up His cross even after He fell under its weight again, and again, and again.

Through the grace of God, Peter, even with all his faults and weaknesses, was able to transform the world and change billions of lives.

Priests, although they are flawed, can use the power of God to transform not only themselves, but also the world around them. The church, and the world for that matter, needs good priests!

I will end the first portion of my series with a plea from St. Francis de Sales, “Those who commit these types of scandals are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder, but I am here among you to prevent something far worse for you. While those who give scandal are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder, those who take scandal—who allow scandals to destroy faith—are guilty of spiritual suicide.” I implore all Catholics, all Christians, do not let the flaws of man take anything away from the grace of God.

Peter was chosen to be the prince of apostles because of his faith, not his flaws. Peter’s three denials of Christ were small matters compared to the millions of lives he changed, and in the same sense, the three percent of the Catholic priesthood that is corrupt is infinitesimal compared to the billions of souls who are brought to true peace, true life, and true love through the beauty that is the Catholic Church. VIVA CRISTO REY!

Murphy Lierley

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