

Homily 8/18/18
20th Week in Ordinary Time
Fr Danny

“Live not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunities because the days are evil.” It’s interesting that this is the reading we get this week. With everything that has gone on in the news, it’s hard for us to imagine how God is still active in our world today at times when we have such horrific and horrendous reports that come out. The words that we heard today in the second reading from St Paul to the Ephesians, are ones that we are called to really take to heart today. To seek to understand the things in our lives that seem incomprehensible.

We have the unexplained violence that happened in one of our local high schools – in Luther. A fourteen-year-old boy stabbed a fourteen-year-old girl! We have to turn to God when we have moments like that that just don’t make sense to us. And then what happened in Philadelphia last week. All the new reports that have come out about yet *another* priest abuse scandal. Ones that yes, should have come out ten years ago, but were held another ten years in secret and in silence.

It’s a hard thing for us to stomach as people and particularly as Catholics. Many people are angry, many people are seeking understanding, trying to figure out why this happening. Where is God in this? Why are these immoral actions continuing to happen? The fact is that many have come out and said that not only are they confused angry and hurt and bewildered, but many are wondering, as the Archbishop of Cincinnati has said, “Many people have come to me and asked: has Jesus abandoned His Church?” then he went on to say we know that is not true. Jesus has not forsaken His Church because He established it, but man is responsible for keeping it going. In fact, it’s not Jesus who has forsaken the Church, but many of those who have been called by God in a specific way that have forsaken their call, their vocation, and Jesus Himself.

They were the ones in the wrong, not Jesus. It’s hard for us to understand, I know. It’s hard for us to look on them and not say, what are we supposed to do now Lord? When those into whose care we’ve been entrusted are no longer caring for us But then we are called to remember that it’s not every priest.

I grew up in a family where the priest was kind of on this pedestal where they were kind of the untouchables where they could do no wrong. And then I met one of my priests from my diocese and I said, yeah, they’re not up on a

pedestal. Priests are not perfect, priests make mistakes. Yes, priests are representations of God here, and are *in persona Christi* “in the person of Christ” in a very special and particular way when they are celebrating Mass.

But sometimes we have the same struggle with priests that we have with Jesus. We see Jesus as the divine person, but we struggle many times with recognizing and remembering that He was also a person, He was human. He also had struggles, He also had temptations. He also got tired. You notice that in a lot of the Gospel readings, Jesus wants to go off by Himself to rest, and then He gets called back.

I didn't really understand that until I became a priest, and sometimes we really want to go off and rest, and we hear, Oh, but Father, we've had someone die. Ok, alright, I'm coming. Just like Jesus does, He continually comes back takes care of the necessities that are there. But we have to remember with our priests, in contrast to Christ, don't always get things right. We're human.

That's not to excuse the horrendous actions that were undertaken by some of these predatory men, that used the priesthood as their venue to do prey upon the innocent. It was horrendous and unacceptable! The hard part for many of us though, is to take it another step further and not just condemn it, but to pray for their souls.

It's a hard thing for us to do. To pray not only for the victims, DEFINITELY for the victims, but to pray also for the accused as well. Because, believe it or not, God still loves them. Just like God still loves you and me when we sin. That our sins, as I've been talking about for the last six months or so, our sins don't define who we are. **We are NOT our sins**, my brothers and sisters.

That's not what unites us, though we are all sinners. What truly unites us is that we are created in the image and likeness of God. And His love is what brings us together. When St Paul was talking to the Ephesians, he was telling them to stop thinking about these foolish ways of just condemning, condemning, condemning, and seek true understanding.

For many of us though, when we're in the midst of these chaotic moments its hard for us to see the big picture. It's hard for us to see the opportunity that tragedy brings to us. It's interesting, that when something bad happens in a community, the community comes together in a very special and particular way. Being in Oklahoma, any time there's a tornado, people come out of the woodwork to try and give of their time, to give of their finances to help those who have been hurt.

A few years ago, when the police were under scrutiny for what some of the police officers had done in racial issues, we had to realize that it wasn't everyone. So the community then came together again and rallied around the good police officers. There were rallies held in support of policemen.

And this week alone, I've gotten multiple phone calls, text messages, emails, Facebook posts saying "Thank you for being one of the eleven that didn't stray." Because when we look at the twelve apostles, we have to remember that one of them didn't get it right. He knew Jesus face to face, and he betrayed Him! He sinned against the Church, just as egregiously as these men have sinned against the Church, but Jesus' response to Judas is the same response that we are called to have toward these men who have made bad decisions. Forgive them Father for they know not what they do.

That's asking a lot. It's really hard to forgive someone who has offended you so horribly. I'm asking you just to pray for them. To pray for their souls. To pray that they may understand the gravity the deepness of their horrible actions. That is our call this week. To see who we are as Catholics. To see how we can support the good priests that are out there, how we can support the church. Because the Church was founded by Jesus not by men. Unfortunately, though, the Church is run by sinful men and sinful women who sometimes get it wrong. That is not to excuse it. But that is to look at the reality in which we live.

And so I'll say it as I've said it before, if I've done anything in the past egregiously or not, that you didn't understand, I'm sorry. Sometimes being a priest is not an easy thing to do. Every situation that I get put into, every decision that I make, there are so many variables out there, trying to make the right choice, and sometimes the right choice for this part of the community is the wrong choice for that part of the community, unfortunately. So, knowing that it is difficult being a priest, please pray for us! Pray for the priests in our diocese! Pray for young men who are considering a vocation to the priesthood!

I'll never forget, right after I applied for seminary, I was still working for DirectTV, and that's a whole other story, and one of my friends who grew up Catholic, came to me when he heard I got accepted to seminary, and said to me, "So you want to be a child molester too?" I didn't understand how someone could go there! They'd known me forever! They'd known my heart, they'd known my soul, but they'd put me in, lumped me in with those who had made egregious decisions!

In that moment I decided that I would continue to pray for all those who had made bad decisions. And I would continue to pray for all of those seeking to

make the same decision that I've made. Seeking to be a priest. As good and as holy as I can be. But also, with all of my flaws, because I'll be the first one to admit that I'm NOT perfect. I'm not on a pedestal, although I am on a step, but that's just because I'm short, and if I was down here, no one would see me! But love your priests. Love each other.

At the end of the day, that's the message that we're called to today. How do we love one another despite the hate, despite the ignorance despite the lack of understanding that we sometimes have? That's a great question. Take it to the Lord and hear His response. We're called to love them. God will forgive them. Because there's nothing that is too bad that we can ever do in our lives. And when Jesus says, Forgive as I forgive you, the challenge is the call to us.

When we say in the Our Father every week, "forgive us as we forgive," it takes another meaning. Because we aren't saying allow us to forgive as you forgive us. For many of us we are condemning ourselves when we say that prayer, because we have unforgiveness in our hearts. Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us. That means that we have to forgive first. With a heart of forgiveness this love can grow.

So, my brothers and sisters, let us love one another. If you haven't told your kids lately that you love them tell them. If you haven't told your parents recently that you love them, tell them! Give your mom a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Give your dad a hug even if he doesn't want to hug you back! I know some men are too macho for hugs, but let your children love you, and love your children. And spouses love your spouses. Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. A sacrificial love that you're called to. The Corinthians takes it a little further and says, and women be subordinate to your husbands the same way the church is subordinate to the rule of God. Love one another, forgive one another, cherish one another, and then all things will finally be in order.