

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM PARISH

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Sunday, August 19, 2018

Dear Friends,

On Wednesday of this past week, the Church celebrated the Assumption into heaven of the Blessed Mother, Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, due to the release the previous day of the comprehensive grand jury report documenting the sexual abuse of over 1,000 children by 301 priests across six Pennsylvania dioceses over the past 70 years, I chose to refer to Mary not in a joyous light but rather as Mary, Our Mother of Sorrows, or Mary, Our Mother of Tears.

In the Gospel of Luke proclaimed on the Feast of the Assumption, Mary says in part, **“God has shown the strength of God’s arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. God has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.” (Luke 1:51-52)**

Through the publication of the grand jury report, we see the words of Mary take flesh. God has indeed shown the strength of his arm by bringing to the light of day the seven decades of clergy sexual abuse of children and the systemic cover-ups by bishops and others in positions of power. We are witnessing God casting down the mighty (priests and bishops) from their thrones of power and uplifting the lowly victims of clergy sexual abuse and cover-up.

These past few days since the release of the report, I have read many, many articles from both the Catholic and secular press. What is my initial response to those articles and the release of the grand jury report? Silence. I don’t want to hear about new programs or strategies the Church can employ for more accountability and transparency. I ask for silence!

Spend time to reflect on the victims’ stories and the pain of not being heard by Church authorities, who supposedly represented Christ. And then, realize that God was present with the victims and their families, but absent in the empty response of the Church authorities. Spend quiet time with Jesus in prayer.

Following the silence, God communicates to us that our prayer is empty if there are not actions of justice on behalf of the victims. The Church needs to move from responding to our horrid history of clerical sexual abuse of children only when our legal system subpoenas our past records, to initiating contact with the legal and civil authorities on behalf of past and current victims. There has been great improvement on the part of the Church in that area since 2002, but we still have miles to go.

In an article I read today, the Bishop of Erie, PA, Lawrence T. Persico, was asked, “Should bishops who knew about or covered up abuse resign?” His response was, “I think they should. I think we need



complete transparency if we are going to get the trust of the people back. We have to be able to demonstrate it."

My words that I am sharing with you today are NOT a comprehensive response to the news of the past week. They are a meager response of a Catholic priest of 35 years, a pastor, a brother, an uncle.

I believe that, for us to move forward, we need to sit a bit in the stench of this grand jury report and the laity of our Church needs to take the lead to make sure this never happens again.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward J. Hallinan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Sincerely in Christ,".

Father Ed Hallinan

Pastor, Saint John Chrysostom Church