

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
June 9/10, 2018 5 PM/8 AM/10 AM Masses 10 AM Mass version
Fr. Joseph Bambenek
Church of St. Pius X, White Bear Lake

Genesis 3:9-15 Psalm 130 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 Mark 3:20-35

I realize that it is a lovely June Sunday morning... summer has started... school just ended... and so it can be especially easy to daydream and to check our watches during the homily. However as I begin this homily, I want you to know upfront that it is perhaps one of the most important homilies I will ever preach, so as you are tempted to daydream, I would ask that you try to stick with me as long as you can. Because even though it is long I think everything that I am sharing with you is necessary.

In the gospel I just proclaimed we heard Jesus say,
“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.”

This wisdom that Jesus shares with us, as is often the case, is wisdom applicable not just in the spiritual life but to many different situations. If you have ever been on a team or in a workplace or part of an organization where things are not going well you can probably relate to how division undermines a group. Jesus recognized how important unity is although not just any kind of unity... A unity grounded in truth, grounded in love, grounded in God. His last words of prayer before He left the Last Supper for the Garden of Gethsemane was that His followers would be united as one just as He and Our Heavenly Father are united as One.

But we know how hard it is to achieve unity. And why is that? From where does disunity come? Sin. In fact, disunity all goes back to what happened in the Bible right before the event that [Joan/Matt/Shane] proclaimed for us in the first reading: the Fall of Adam and Eve. Today’s reading picks up right after the first sin was committed. And guess what we hear? We hear the disunity beginning. First of all we hear that Adam and Eve are hiding. In their shame, they can’t be comfortable with God anymore and they have sewn leaves to cover themselves as they are no longer comfortable being fully seen by each other. Yet despite their efforts to hide, God finds them anyway: Adam and Eve have been caught. What do they do? The blame game begins. Adam blames Eve and Adam also blames God for creating Eve... not a good move Adam. Eve blames the serpent. The cycle begins. Unity breaks down quickly. That is what sin does. And while the explicit blame game began once they were caught, the hiding and protecting themselves from one another and God had already begun once the sin was committed. For sins that do not go addressed, but are allowed to happen or even flourish, do much to break down unity in a community [of people]... as people feel the need to hide and to place more and more layers between themselves to protect themselves, and some leave. I suspect that many of us can relate to this in one or more aspects of our lives.

But even at the end of the first reading, immediately after the Fall, there is hope... there is the first clue that the Devil will not have the last laugh [in the end]. We hear that a woman will arise, who we believe is the Blessed Mother, and that her offspring, Who we believe to be Jesus, will strike at the serpent’s head. The past two days at daily Mass we have remembered the wonderful, loving tag team of Jesus and Mary... a team to defeat the devil... as we have celebrated the Feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary. That is why I

am wearing this vestment today which I personally purchased in Lourdes in anticipation of the Healing the Whole Parish retreat later this year.

How was it that Jesus struck at the head of the serpent? Did Jesus overpower the serpent in battle, like a conquering general? [Did Jesus come to overthrow the oppressive Romans as people thought the Messiah would do?] No. The way that victory over the serpent and sin and death happened was a way that no one really saw coming, even though it was prophesied quite clearly in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah wrote “He was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed.” (Isaiah 53:5). The debt for Original Sin, the sin of our common natural father and mother Adam and Eve, and the debt for our personal sins, were paid thanks to Jesus’ sacrificial love and the mercy that He showed. He made that atonement for sin, the payment of the sin debt through His humility in coming to Earth, through His excruciatingly painful death, through the forgiveness that He offered for all who want to receive it [as a result of the payment]. After Jesus died and then rose, St. Peter described what Jesus did, “He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Put another way, it was through that self-giving, yet life-giving act of tremendous love of Jesus, which occurred as He was united in prayer with God the Father, that the debt of sin could be taken away and that restoration could be possible.

And there is even more! Jesus left something behind when He returned to heaven. He left behind for us His Body and Blood, the very substance through which He purchased our freedom from sin, so that we can become the Body of Christ. So that we can live in greater unity, like a well-functioning body, if we just are open to receive what He wants to give us. And, before He ascended to heaven to be with Our Heavenly Father, Jesus chose to establish a Church through which bishops and priests pass along what He lived and gave; a Church in which the clergy are to live in a unique way in His image and to pass along the gifts of love and mercy He left for us. And while there is a special responsibility for the clergy, all who are believers in Jesus are to follow His example.

Two weeks ago I was at our magnificent St. Paul Cathedral when four men, including fellow MIT graduate Matt Shireman, committed their lives to living out and passing along these gifts of Jesus through the ordained priesthood. We, as Catholics, call our ordained ministers priests, not just ministers, because the word priesthood has at its essence sacrifice. At his ordination, Matt and any soon-to-be priest makes a series of promises proposed to him by the bishop. As the couple married here yesterday did in front of the altar,¹ the future priest answers a simple “I do” to all but one of the questions. To one promise, however, he answers, instead, “I do with the help of God!” The promise that especially needs God’s help to fulfill is: “Do you resolve to be united more closely every day to Christ High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with him to consecrate yourselves to God for the salvation of all?” In keeping with that promise, as ordained priests Fr. Matt, myself, and all other priests are in a special way both the stewards of Jesus’ sacrifice and we are called to live in His sacrificial image.

Yet there is a challenge. Priests are men who are sinners. As the now-Bishop Cozzens taught us in Seminary [when he was a professor and I was a student,] there is always a gap between who a priest is called to represent, Jesus, and who he is as a human being impacted by concupiscence, the tendency to sin that we all have. For many priests the gap between who we

¹ at the 10 AM Mass the best man and others of the groom’s family were present so I called them out here

are called to be and who we are is relatively narrow.² Most priests are quite good, dedicated men, some are even saintly, although none of us is perfect. But we also know that, as we have been hearing about in our Archdiocese in an acute way for the past half-decade, and even longer more generally, the gap between the lives of Jesus and the lives of certain priests has been tragically horribly large. As a result, those sinful men have betrayed, deeply harmed and stole the innocence of at least hundreds of young people directly, and at least hundreds of thousands of people indirectly.

Before I say anything more, I want to thank each of you for your faithfulness to our beautiful Church... to our beautiful faith... in spite of all that has come to light. I want to acknowledge and thank you for the suffering you have endured as a result of this dark chapter in our Local Church's history. Perhaps a few of you have faced this darkness for a long time, as either you yourself or people close to you were abused. If so, I am especially sorry. Whether or not you were or knew someone who was abused, many of you have suffered by being chastised by family members, friends, coworkers and acquaintances for remaining Catholic through this dark time. You have also watched people with whom you used to come to Mass, perhaps the people who sat in the pew next to you, leave the Church as a result of what has happened, perhaps even close family and friends. Most of us have had our faith shaken at some level by the failings of our leaders. As an ordained priest, I want to join in the apology given by our local shepherd, Archbishop Hebda, and apologize for what you have been put through due to the deplorable actions of some of my brothers in the clergy: certain priests and bishops.

As you likely know on May 31, the Feast of the Visitation of Mary, a Settlement Agreement was reached to bring financial closure to this terrible situation. Ironically, if I recall correctly, the banner headline in the *Star Tribune* called it a \$210 million atonement; a payment for the sins of our fathers to their direct victims. \$170 million is coming from the insurance companies who covered the Archdiocese and the parishes whenever those things happened. \$40 million of that money is coming from the Archdiocese and parishes in one way or another. Three years ago, when the Bankruptcy started, it was thought that no money would come from parishes themselves. However, right before Christmas, the judge in the Bankruptcy case wrote a powerful memorandum, one that for me was incredible spiritual reading.³ In it he basically said that although parishes might not have a legal obligation to pay, they have a moral obligation to do so. It was not clear how that was going to happen, but very quickly I was spiritually convicted... although the lawyers don't let me use the term convicted, so I should say convinced of what I personally needed to do if I were to retain the moral authority to pastor our parish; a parish against which multiple legal claims were filed.

I know this homily is already long, so I will leave some of the details to the Town Hall meeting we are having Wednesday night... But after discussion with the two parish trustees, Executive Administrator Bryan Zimmerman, and the lawyers the parish retained, we decided that St Pius will contribute \$36,545 to the settlement fund. Before I say anything more, I want to thank Bryan and trustees Mindy Hoefer,⁴ Bob York and through most of the process John Chaplin for the many hours of time and difficult communications we had regarding this horrible matter. And I also to thank our primary lawyer Mark Kalla and his associate Allyssa Troje for the excellent way they represented the parish.

² In absolute terms the gap is infinite.

³ <http://www.mnb.uscourts.gov/content/archdiocese-saint-paul-and-minneapolis-bky-15-30125>

⁴ Bryan and Mindy were at the Mass so I commented on that.

You may be wondering: why is St. Pius contributing such strange amount, \$36,545? The answer is that it is equal to my salary for the upcoming fiscal year[, starting July 1]. To put it simply, I will spend the next year offering atonement for the sins of one or more of my predecessors, as I will give back to the parish my salary. I am doing that because I promised to conform my life to that of Jesus, with the help of God. I am doing that because priests throughout the centuries have laid down their very lives for their flock in the face of repressive governments. This is merely one year of my salary to atone for the sins of my brother or brothers who served in my office... and thanks to your generosity, I still get to live in a lovely rectory as I do so. I am doing it because while it may be unfair for me to have to pay, it would be even more unfair for you to have to pay. A true leader stands in the gap to protect those he serves, as Moses showed, and a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,⁵ as Jesus taught and lived. And I am doing it because I realize that what has happened has been so disgusting that if your generosity to the parish went to pay part of the settlement, it might be the final straw to break the camel's back for one or more of my flock. I am attempting to act in keeping with the essence of the priesthood, and for that matter, with the essence of true fatherhood... with Father's Day coming next weekend.

In the bankruptcy we have been operating, and continue to operate, under a court-imposed confidentiality agreement, so it was only after clearing what I can share with the lawyers, that I share this news with you. On Thursday I first shared the news with the parish staff and the Finance Council, and my family for that matter. The reaction was not exactly what I was hoping. The reaction was more about how unfair this is to me. Although I would add that compared to how unfair what happened to the victims, it is a small injustice. And people started asking about how they can help me help me out. It is true that this next year I will need to become more willing to accept the generosity of others and less seeking to provide for the material needs of those I shepherd. Dave Kolling on our finance council also made a very good theological point: that all Catholics share in the priesthood of baptism, so we should all share in the sacrifice. And several commented that I should let the people of St. Pius help me carry the cross.

While I appreciate the concern, I agree that there needs to be a sharing of the carrying of the cross, and it is true that I should not be depriving you all of the exercise of your baptismal priesthood... I would propose that the cross that we need to share not is the \$36,545. The cross that needs to be shared is the cross carried by the victims of what happened which starts with the survivors who were abused... but it also includes all of us who have been harmed. Money is only a piece of the cross that needs to be carried. That is the part of the cross I feel called to carry. Serious sin has immense consequences and there is much healing and much restoration that needs to be done in so many ways. The reality is that healing and restoration come through actions of sacrificial love; they come through prayer; and they come through providing hope by encouraging one another. That, quite frankly, is how we are supposed to live as Christians whether or not our Archdiocese is emerging from a crisis. It is tragic that we have this particularly yucky issue to deal with in our time and place. But that is where we are, and this is where God has placed us to live our faith. In every place and time there are difficult issues to restore as a result of sin. And if it seems like that restoration is not a part of the Christian life in some era, it is most likely because the sins are being covered up.

⁵ In fact, evening prayer on Thursday night, for the eve of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had a response "I am the Good Shepherd; I pasture my sheep and I lay down my life for them."

Our parish motto is to restore all things in Christ. The response I want each one of us to have to this homily should not focus on Fr. Joe nor how to help him? But rather, the response I want each of us to have is: how is God inviting me, personally, to act in a spirit of self-giving love to those around me, and especially, to those who have somehow been impacted by these serious sins? How am I being asked to exercise my baptismal priesthood? How am I being asked to sacrificially love? We are the Body of Christ, made up of many gifts and talents, and God wants to use the gifts and talents of us all. For some here it might be to reach out in love to someone in our family or a close friend who has left the Church due to the scandal. For others it might be to fast and pray. For all of us it is to become more merciful people: people who seek and give forgiveness to others, and ourselves. For some it might be to volunteer at an organization that serves those who have been wounded in all sorts of ways; for others, to give financial support to healing ministries. For a few, it might mean finally having the courage to confront someone who is harming other people in whatever ways they may be harming them. And I would invite all the adults to put on your calendar the Healing the Whole Parish retreat, being held here during the first weekend of October (Oct 5-7). The retreat's main purpose is well-beyond the crisis, although it will touch upon it, and it will hopefully be a springboard to our own healing and how we can help others heal. And I would ask that you pray for me as I seek to pull together the retreat, as the onslaught of things that have been thrown at me as I have tried to develop it make it clear that the serpent is scared.

Once again, my dear sisters and brothers... I apologize for what you have been put through due to the sins of my brothers; due to how they have tragically failed to live in the image of Jesus and of true fatherhood. As we move forward, as we prepare to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, let us strive to be ever more the Body of Christ. Let us be confident of God's promise that where sin abounds, grace abounds more (Romans 5:20)... and His promise that God works out all things for good for those who love Him [and are called according to His purpose] (Romans 8:28). With that confidence may we [be resolved to] ask ourselves: How is God inviting me to encourage and sacrificially love others, especially those who have been wounded through the crisis? And then, instead of wallowing in what has happened in the past, God wants us to move forward, seeking to bring restoration, while still looking ahead to great things God wants to do through us, with our eyes set on heaven and our hearts filled with love for Him and others. As members of the priesthood of the baptized, let us pray for one another... and may all of us, with the help of God, do our part in the body of Christ, and with the strength of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, to live out what I prayed at the start of Mass: "Grant that we, who call on you in our need, may at your prompting discern what is right, and by your guidance do it."