

## I. Introduction

- A. I wanted to celebrate Mass here at the Cathedral parish, not only because it's the day when we celebrate our patronal feast, Mary Our Queen, but also because it has been a very dark week in the life of the Church. On the heels of the revelations about Archbishop McCarrick came the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report which detailed over decades a tsunami of moral evil on the part of church leadership – the reprehensible crimes committed against young people and the failures of church leadership to respond with honesty and compassion. This morning I come before you with humility to acknowledge and share in the anger and bewilderment you and so many feel over the abject failures of episcopal leadership that have put the innocent and vulnerable in harm's way.
- B. In responding to this compound evil and in seeking to root it out from our midst, where might we turn, at least this morning, to find a way forward that corresponds with God's will for his Church? I'd suggest that we allow St. Paul to speak to us as once he spoke to the Ephesians. Only then might we be able to hear what Jesus, the Bread of Life, wants to tell us in this time when darkness seems to overtake the light and evil seems to overshadow the good.

## II. St. Paul to the Ephesians

- A. This morning's passage from Ephesians is about our moral life. St. Paul draws a sharp contrast between living foolishly and living wisely, between living in ignorance and trying to understand what is the will of the Lord. What do his words mean for us in the present context?
- B. When the Bible talks about living foolishly, it means that we marginalize God. We may profess our faith and claim to be believers, but in our day-to-day decisions we exclude God in whole or in part. As Psalm 14 puts it, "Fools say in their hearts, there is no God" (Ps. 14:1). By contrast, when the Bible speaks about living wisely, it means that, in our day-to-day lives, we fear the Lord – that is to say – we reverence the Lord by striving in his grace to do what he asks of us, for as Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn. 15:14).

**Conduct that is foolish leads to moral disaster.**

**Conduct that is wise leads to the beatitude, the happiness that Jesus promised to those who become like him, both inwardly and outwardly.**

- C. Failures by bishops through the years to address the evil of abuse with candor and thoroughness were foolish in the biblical sense of the word. They were foolish not just because, in hindsight, they are deeply embarrassing but more so, because a reverent fear of the Lord seems to be absent in the way the decisions were made and in the decisions themselves. As a result, the ungodliness of abuse has persisted in our midst far too long. Many innocent people were harmed and the Church's mission to preach the Gospel has been hobbled.**
- D. In today's reading, St. Paul also uses the word "debauchery". And while that word usually refers to excessive drinking, in our situation it makes us think of all kinds of utterly corrupt behavior that crept into the life of the Church and its ministers. Such things do not cancel the truth of the Gospel or undermine the validity and power of the sacraments. But they do undermine one's capacity to preach the word of God authentically and one's ability to worship God in spirit and in truth. This is the indictment that we, your shepherds, should fear the most. The many steps already taken to create safe environments in our parishes & schools, & the further steps that will be taken to heal this wound in the heart of the Church – all these must always be done with the participation of you, the laity, and in a spirit of profound conversion that upends the hearts of us, your shepherds, . . . cleansing them from immorality, clericalism, the bureaucratization of evil, from that malady which Pope Francis identifies as "spiritual worldliness". We bishops must learn how hold one another accountable but we also must learn how to be truly accountable to the whole Church. We have a long way to go. There is much work to do.**

### **III. The Bread of Life**

- A. In all of this, however, another temptation lurks, namely, the temptation for us to separate ourselves from Christ and his Church, to walk away from the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the community of believers. The Evil One, who has wreaked moral havoc in our midst, wants nothing more than to have us to lose our faith or to trade it in for something less. For while the Church is holy, the Church is also sinful in us, its members.**

From the beginning and throughout its history, it has been beset by the scandalous behavior on the part of those who profess the name of Jesus. When Jesus said that he ‘came to call sinners,’ he meant it.

- B. That is why, throughout his letters, St. Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit. It is true we received the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. But in our weakness we need to be filled with the Spirit again and again if we, both clergy and laity, are to reject ungodliness and instead find the wisdom and strength to conquer evil with good. And where else on a weekly basis do we turn to be filled with the Holy Spirit than Sunday Eucharist, in which we receive Jesus, the Bread of Life? In a few moments, we will offer these words from the III Eucharistic Prayer: “Grant that we who are nourished by [Christ’s] Body and Blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ.”**
- C. With the words of Jesus in the Bread of Life of Discourse lingering in our hearts – “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” – with those words echoing in our minds and hearts, let us beg the Eucharistic Lord to pour out his Spirit upon us. The only way forward in this difficult hour is to center our lives on Christ and through Christ to give the Spirit access to our hearts. In that way, instead of clergy and laity growing apart from one another, we will strive in God’s grace to repair broken relationships, to heal those who have been wounded and disillusioned, and to renew the internal workings of the Church. None of this can be done, however, unless we keep Christ at the center of our lives. Now more than ever we need to hear the truth of the Gospel. Now more than ever we need Jesus, the Bread of Life.**
- D. Finally, let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary to ask her intercession. She is the Mother of Jesus and our Mother also. As she stood beneath the Cross, she shared fully in her Son’s suffering, a suffering that included betrayal and desertion by the Lord’s closest followers. More than anyone Mary understands what we are going through. Reigning in heaven, sharing her Son’s glory, she remains very close to us in our distress. May she pray with us and for us!**
- E. Thank you for listening. Please pray for me. Please know that I pray daily for you. May God bless us and keep us always in his love.**