

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's Gospel speaks to us of how St. Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Christ. In Matthew's Gospel (chapter 16), we hear how Jesus then makes Peter the Pope – changing his name and giving him the keys of the Kingdom. While this weekend's reading from Mark omits this, both Gospels go immediately from this identification of being "Christ" to speaking of His upcoming passion and death. When Peter hears this, he rebukes Jesus, but then Jesus rebukes Peter, calling him "Satan":

Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do. (Mark 8:33)

This is a strong reminder to me that while God has given the Church authority – and even called it to attack evil in this world ("**the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it** [the Church]" Matthew 16:18) – the people in the Church will make mistakes, and even sin – sin grievously. We see this as early as when St. Peter denied Jesus, and Judas betraying Him.

As I have mentioned before, I am very much distressed by the reports about Cardinal McCarrick and the grand jury report from Pennsylvania that have rocked the Church over recent weeks. The selfish, hurtful actions of priests and bishops have deeply wounded individuals, the Church and the Heart of Jesus. Reading some of the reports have left me disgusted and ashamed at what some of my brothers have done, and left my heart wounded for those who have been hurt so deeply.

But this does not change what the Church is. This is not the first time the Church has been faced with the deep scars of scandals... and I'm not just speaking about 2002. Over the 2000 years of Church history, there have been untold number of times that the Church has been rocked by the wounds caused by the clergy. In fact, one of the anecdotes I love is when Napoleon was having a frustrating conversation with a cardinal. Napoleon warned the Cardinal to be careful because he had power to destroy the Catholic Church. The Cardinal replied, "If in 1,800 years we clergy have failed to destroy the Church, do you really think that you'll be able to do it?"

This is the truth: if the Church were a human institution, it would have fallen apart centuries ago; it would have been a blip on the radar of history, maybe... maybe making it into the most obscure documents. But the Church still exists because it is of Divine origin. The Church is held in the Hands of God, created by Jesus, and is His Body, His Bride. The Church *is* the Sacrament of Salvation, the gift of Christ that allows us to enter into union with God.

Why do I say this? To downplay the horror of the abuses and cover-up of the clergy? **No.** Absolutely not. The wounds they have caused need to be healed, and those who have wounded the Church need to repent. (In fact, as I write this, I think about how many ways I have wounded the Church, and my own need of repentance. How many times has my anger, impatience, or lack of love and care for others left the Church wounded? True, the wounds may not be as deep or grievous as others, but I know full well my weakness and my own need to repent.) But this doesn't mean that we should leave the Church. This is the time, more than ever that we need – yes, *need* – the Church. Pope Francis has referred to the Church as a "Field Hospital." This is so true. We are all wounded – even the doctors and nurses in this hospital – yet this is the best place to receive healing.

I ask that in the midst of the turmoil of this time in the Church, that you keep your eyes fixed on Christ, the Healer. He comes to us in powerfully healing ways through the Sacraments – especially Holy Communion and Reconciliation. It will only be in getting closer to Christ and His Church, not by distancing ourselves, that we will find the healing we need.

On another note: please pray for me and pray for all priests. Satan has us in his crosshairs. Think about this: if Satan takes out a lay Catholic (through temptation or other means), that effects that person, maybe his or her family, and those directly entwined in the situation. If he takes out a priest, however, it effects a whole parish, maybe a whole diocese, and, as we are seeing, maybe even further. It is more efficient for Satan to target priests. We – I – need your prayers to protect us from Satan's attacks. Please, pray. Thank you. Know that I pray for you every day.