

Ecclesiasticus 27:4-7
1 Corinthians 15:54-58
Luke 6:39-45

Over the last few months I have been finding it increasingly difficult to look at the news. The spotlight is firmly focused on the serious failings of some highly trusted members of the Church. I have struggled to come to terms with the betrayal of trust on a such a large scale and the damage that this is doing to the Church's mission to bring the light of Christ into people's lives.

Listening to the Gospel at Mass on Thursday and reflecting on today's readings is helping me to refocus my emotions. I hope these reflections help you too.

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus say:

The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher.

In the context of Luke's Gospel, it is very clear that the teacher referred to here is Jesus. It is only complete commitment to Jesus that will enable disciples to become effective evangelisers in the community. But it is emphasised that **no** disciple will ever be **greater** than Jesus.

One of the challenges in the Church today is to avoid the cult of personality. Many of us have our favourite priests, bishops and even Popes. While this can seem harmless, it can quickly become destructive when support for our favourites begins to obscure the fact that we are meant to be following Jesus. As human beings we are all frail and fragile creatures who sin and who are tempted to sometimes cover up, or turn a blind eye to, the sins and failings of those we admire. This is a major problem with the cult of personality.

We can only overcome the cult of personality in the Church by constantly turning our attention back to Jesus and listening carefully to what he says about certain types of behaviour. Jesus is generally very patient and forgiving of sinners but at Mass last Thursday we heard the following words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark:

If anyone is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, he would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone around his neck.

Strong words. In fact, Jesus could not have stated more strongly the seriousness of sins that harm children. Throughout the Old Testament drowning was one of the punishments reserved for enemies of God. Pope Francis has echoed the view of Jesus when he referred to priests who abuse their positions of trust and power as "tools of Satan".

The position of Christ and his Church on sins against children is crystal clear but it has become obscured by the weakness of some of its members who have sinned and others who have either turned a blind eye or who have not known how to react. None of this can be excused but **our** task today is to reflect on how each one of us can play a part in bringing the Church back in line with the clear teachings of Jesus.

Again, the passage from Luke's Gospel that we have just heard can help us. The words of Jesus speak as clearly to the Church today as they did to the people of his time, when he says

“Hypocrite, take the plank out of your own eye first and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye.”

How can the Church teach people about the love of God when some of its most trusted members are betraying that trust by their actions with children? This is a massive plank in the eye of the Church and prevents it from effectively teaching the world about God's love.

Last week, at a gathering of victims of abuse, lay experts and bishops in Rome, Pope Francis began the process of trying to remove this plank from the eyes of the Church across the world. It will be a painful process, but it has begun, and it needs our prayers and full support.

How can we support the process of removing this plank from the eyes of the Church?

Each one of us must be prepared to listen to the voices of the abused, share their pain and open our hearts in love to them.

And it strikes me that there might be two planks that we need to remove from our own eyes if we are to be able to do this effectively.

The first plank is a form of denial or complacency that tells us that the crisis is not as bad as reported. We have to see and feel the wounds before we can help them heal. Denial and complacency might keep us in our comfort zones for a little longer, but it will not help us bring the healing love of God to the bruised and broken people of our World.

The second plank is one that I am working hard to remove from my own eyes. My plank, which I know some of you share, consists of anger with all in the Church who have betrayed our trust and abused their power to harm the children that Jesus tells us have a special place in his Father's kingdom.

We must never ignore the evil that has been done, and continues to be done, but we must divert our energies away from a paralysing anger at the perpetrators towards a confident love and compassion for all victims of abuse, especially those who have suffered at the hands of Church officials. We must ensure that our Church is always a safe and welcoming place for children and all those adults who are hurt and bruised. This will not be easy, and we will need to understand the anger and hostility that many feel towards the Church. But if we focus on Christ as our true teacher, we can help and support the healing process that started in Rome last week.