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**Pastor's Column**

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**No, I Cannot Free Myself from You,  
Because I Am You,  
and Where Would I Go?**

*This is the seventh, and last, in a series of perspectives that I am providing on the clergy sexual abuse crisis that continues to grip the Church. I am concluding this series with my own personal thoughts.*

*Here is a list of the previously published perspectives in our Parish bulletin:*

***“What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?”***

*by Deacon Greg Kendra, April 11, 2010;*

***“Why I Remain a Catholic”***

*by Elizabeth Scalia, April 18, 2010;*

***“The Catholic Church’s Catastrophe”***

*by Peggy Noonan, April 25, 2010;*

***Homily at the Easter Vigil, April 3, 2010”***

*by Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, May 2, 2010.*

***“We Are Being Forced to Our Knees,”***

*by Bishop Raymond Lueker in 1993, May 9, 2010*

***“As Easter Nears, Priests Struggle with How, Whether to Address Church Scandals”***

*by Walter Wan, May 16, 2010.*

*If you have not yet read these, I would encourage you to do so. They are available on our Parish website: [www.stmoside.org](http://www.stmoside.org), then click on Pastor's Columns.*

*F. Mike*

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“How baffling you are, O Church, and yet how I love you! How you have made me suffer, and yet how much I owe you! I should like to see you destroyed, and yet I need your presence. You have given me so much scandal and yet have made me understand sanctity. I have seen nothing in the world more compromised and more false, and yet I have touched nothing more pure, more generous, more beautiful. How often I have wanted to shut the doors of my soul to you, and how often I have prayed to die in the safety of your arms. No, I cannot free myself from you, because *I am you*, and where would I go?” (*The God Who Comes by Carlo Carretto, published in 1981*)

This is the seventh and final piece in a series of articles dealing with the clergy sexual abuse crisis that continues to grip the Church worldwide.

Shortly before Easter, I, like many Catholic Pastors across the country and around the world, was struggling with what to say and how to say it. Silence was not an option. There is an “elephant in the room,” and it needs to be recognized and addressed.

The perspectives that have been included in my “Pastor’s Columns” these past weeks have been chosen because they spoke “to me,” and now speak “for me,” in that I share the views expressed in them.

If you have not read them yet, I would encourage you to do so. That will help you better understand my thoughts in this article. Again, these are my thoughts and perspectives that I hope will be just one voice of many that will help create an ongoing conversation to better understand and respond in faith to the reality of our times.

On May 11, Pope Benedict XVI, while aboard the Papal plane, en-route from Rome to Lisbon, to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima made these comments: “...There is also the fact that attacks on the Pope and the Church come not only from without, but the sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin existing within the Church. This too is something that we have always known, but

today we are seeing it in a really terrifying way: that the greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church, and the Church thus has a deep need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn forgiveness on the one hand, but also the need for justice. Forgiveness does not replace justice. In a word, we need to relearn precisely this essential: conversion, prayer, penance and the theological virtues...”

In these words, I find the Pope re-directing the discussion. It is time to stop criticizing the media and others for doing their job, for fulfilling their responsibilities. Yes, at times, it may seem that certain journalists or newspapers have a certain agenda that might be “anti-Church.” But, in the long run, it serves no purpose to attack the media. The best way to respond is simply to answer the questions, charges, comments, that are raised. And we need to do so honestly, truthfully, and as transparently as possible, and not criticize the journalist or the newspaper that has raised the charges. This defensiveness only heaps more negativity upon the Church.

I believe that the day will come, and I think that it is already here, that we will thank the media for what they have done—for seeing what we as a Church have neglected or refused to see, and as painful and expensive as this process is, they have helped us to look at ourselves under a microscope, to purify ourselves, and to be renewed.

The Church, for far too long, has fostered and nurtured a “damaging culture which has grown up in the Church.” (*Diarmuid Martin, the Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, from his Easter Vigil homily, April 3, 2010*)

From my perspective, this “damaging culture” is one of clericalism that has separated the priest from his people, has made him “better” than his people, created an atmosphere around him of power, privilege, and, yes, secrecy—a secrecy that was needed when the cleric sinned, whatever the sin might be, and created a potential for scandal.

This damaging culture of clericalism is dying a slow death, and we are paying the price for its remnants. And, sadly, in some places within the Church, there even seems to be a resurgence of this culture, a desire to re-capture the past as the way in which to move into the future.

We need to trust more in the goodness of the People of God who are a loving and forgiving people. They are so, because they have been loved and forgiven by their priests, and they will, when necessary, love and forgive their priests. They know that their pastoral leaders are human beings and that priests struggle with humanity just as they do.

Clericalism pits priest against people, and serves no good purpose.

“The life of a priest or bishop is not his own. The only real home we have is in the love of our people.” (*Archbishop Jose Gomez, Co-Adjutor of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, April 6, 2010, comments made upon his appointment to Los Angeles.*) A priest is meant to be one with the People of God, gifted with the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to lead them; and just as importantly, also gifted with the grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to walk *with* his people.

The Catholic Church is a universal institution – the oldest on the face of the earth. From the Acts of the Apostles, we know that the first generation of Resurrection witnesses carried the Good News to the then known ends of the earth. It has been so ever since.

A 2,000 year old universal institution changes slowly, and it does not change uniformly. Depending on one’s point of view, change is implemented more quickly or more slowly in various parts of the world for a myriad of reasons.

The Church is alive and well! We just need to look around the world and see the many places in which the Gospel is being preached and lived, where the people are coming together in Faith Communities with Jesus Christ as the center of

their lives, where men and women are dying, literally, for living and witnessing to the faith. The blood of the martyrs is being poured out on a daily basis. It is this blood and this sacrifice that creates new life for the Church.

I look at our own Faith Community, the Church of St. Thomas More. Although we may not be shedding our blood as martyrs are doing in some places of the world, we are alive and well.

I feel so privileged to be one *with* all of our Parish Staff: men and women, celibate, married, and single, full-time and part-time ministers in service to this community, and who, in turn, lead our parishioners in so many ministries that benefit our Faith Community and the wider community and world in which we find ourselves.

It is because of this blessed “mix” of people, ministering together, that we sense and experience the vibrancy and the “newness and freshness” of life that Faith in Jesus Christ brings!

The editors of the Jesuit Magazine, *America*, called the Roman Curia, “...the last Renaissance court.” (*America Magazine, Pilgrim People, Part II, May 17, 2010*)

For some, this may be an accurate assessment; for others, it may be a harsh assessment, but, it is important for us to reflect upon these words.

As the Pope and the Vatican Officials respond to clergy sexual abuse, I wonder with whom do they dialogue to help form their responses? Do they have a mix of people: men and women of all ages, celibate, married, and single who help to create policies for the Church? Or are they still relying mainly only on priests, bishops, and cardinals? Obviously this is a very valid voice, but would not better responses happen with the voice of a cross-section of the laity included as well? It seems a fair question to ask, because so much of the workings of the Vatican are still “behind closed doors,” lacking an openness and transparency.

Most pastors in their parishes and bishops in their dioceses today rely upon this mix of people to help minister to the needs of the Church. Such a mix better represents the diversity of the people to whom they minister.

We see this happening in every profession around the world – people in various professions now reflecting the make-up of the people they desire to serve. A greater diversity creates more meaningful discussion which, in the end, creates better solutions to the realities of the day.

In that same issue of *America*, the editors state: “But direct efforts to correct and prevent abuse of minors are only the most obvious part of a larger healing needed in the church...At all levels, right down to the parish, much of the church has proven deficient in its ability to listen and interact with adult believers.” (*America Magazine, Pilgrim People, Part II, May 17, 2010*)

The clergy sexual abuse crisis has spawned much in the way of wider discussion about the Church in regard to how we all communicate with one another, and how we, as a Church, need to address the social realities of our times.

As painful as this has been, and will continue to be, this crisis provides an opportunity, if we choose to seize it, for personal and corporate renewal. It helps us focus more intently upon the central tenet of our faith – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin reminds us, “That explosion of light which is the Resurrection tells us and reminds us even in the darkest days that there is always a future beyond darkness.” (*Easter Vigil Homily, April 3, 2010*)

We need to grasp the Light that is in our present darkness and creatively find new ways in which to continue the Mission and Ministry of Jesus for this time and this place.

All of us are responsible to do what we can in our own little corners of the world. We do what we can, knowing that God will bring it all together in God’s way and God’s time.

Hopefully, we can live the words of Carlo Carretto with confidence, as we realize our relationship to the Church, the Body of Christ: “No, I cannot free myself from you, because *I am you*, and where would I go?”

