

The Jackson County Prosecutor has charged our bishop, Robert Finn, and our diocese, Kansas City-St. Joseph, with the misdemeanor of failure to report child abuse in a case of one of our priests, who is accused of possessing child pornography. The bishop and the diocese have entered pleas of not guilty. The State of Missouri obliges clergy and operators of schools to report reasonable suspicions of child abuse, and the indictment alleges that the bishop and the diocese failed to do that. This past Friday the bishop expressed complete cooperation, reiterating what he has done to correct the situation that led to the crisis. Among other actions, he has created the position of ombudsman, using a former prosecutor who will review all allegations of misconduct in order to report suspicious activity directly to the police. Here at St. Munchin and St. Aloysius, we have begun printing the name and phone number of that ombudsman in the weekly bulletin: Jennifer Valenti, 816-812-2500. As a parish we cannot tolerate the sexual abuse of children, and if anyone is aware of it, or has been a victim of it, I urge you to contact authorities. Bishop Finn said in his remarks, "I ask the prayerful support and unity of our priests, our people, the parishes, and the Catholic institutions. With continued dedication, we will persevere in the many good works that are the hallmark of the faithful people of the diocese throughout its 27 counties and nearly 150-year heritage. With ever stronger determination, we will form, teach, and protect children and care for the spiritual and material needs of people who look daily to the diocese for assistance."

The relationship between church and state is the subject of today's gospel and first reading. Jesus famously says, "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God," which shows the distinction between church and state, whereas the first reading is a story of how the noble principles of faith can have a positive impact on the state. Isaiah tells about King Cyrus of Persia, who ended the Babylonian captivity, sending people home from their exile. In the view of Isaiah, Cyrus, a leader of state, acted as an agent of God, who gave him strength to set free those unjustly bound. The psalm puts all this in perspective with its antiphon, "Give the Lord glory and honor." It says in one verse, "you families of nations, give to the Lord glory and praise; give to the Lord the glory due his name." In other words, "You world leaders may think you are the ones who govern the great nations on earth, but even you should give homage to the Lord and act in ways that please God."

The child sexual abuse scandal that has embarrassed the Catholic Church for decades came to light because of people who followed through on principles our church stands for: the protection of human life, the good of stable families, and the integrity expected of our leaders. Where we have failed in the past we aim to make amends so that we can carry out the mission God has entrusted to us. Our society needs the good leadership that the Catholic Church can provide, in order to support the common good of peace and prosperity, and to hold aloft the ideals of right over wrong. Ultimately, no one of us is first a child of any nation, but a child of God, to whom we owe glory and honor. We can each contribute to a better world by fulfilling our duties to God and country, to church and state, to obey what God commands, and to guide our civic leaders in the pursuit of justice and right.