

The same pedophilia scandal that horrified the Catholic Church in the United States a few years ago is now spreading throughout Europe. Those who have suffered the most are the victims, who trusted their religious leaders, and suffered betrayal and abuse. Many Catholics have become disillusioned with their bishops, who did not do enough to stop the crimes, and in some cases caused them to spread. Those outside our Church have spurned us, and these many events have eroded our credibility when we speak on moral issues. Society does not often forgive hypocrisy. The scandal in Europe opened in Ireland, where a few months ago the bishop of Limerick resigned because of accusations that he mismanaged cases when he was an auxiliary bishop in Dublin. This especially saddens us at St. Munchin Church in Cameron because our patron saint was the first bishop of Limerick, a man who attracted people to the Christian faith and set the Church upon a firm foundation in that part of Ireland. In recent weeks the scandal has reached all the way to Pope Benedict, who, some people say, failed to act when he was archbishop of Munich and the cardinal in charge of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Pope Benedict is an intelligent man of great integrity; it is unthinkable that he knowingly contributed to the spread of such evil behavior. I am sure he is personally troubled by the developments throughout Europe, and that he will take appropriate steps to condemn abuse in all its forms, to demand accountability from everyone, and to extend assistance to innocent victims.

Isaiah gives a moving account of an innocent victim from whom much good came. Today's first reading is the last of four oracles about a suffering servant. A Christian can't read it without realizing how strongly it prophesied the suffering of Jesus. Isaiah speaks of this servant as a person who grew up like a sapling, a shoot from parched earth, and having no stately bearing, so people ignored him. He grew accustomed to infirmity and was held in no esteem. So people then thought of him as stricken and afflicted. But Isaiah says that all this time, the servant was suffering for us. We committed the offenses, and he was pierced. We had gone astray, and God laid our guilt upon him. How did the servant react? He was silent, oppressed, and condemned. He was given a grave among the wicked – though he had done nothing wrong. Imagine it this way – suppose you stole something at the workplace, and the boss fired somebody else, somebody who didn't get along with others, or who had some physical handicap. Imagine that that person is now suffering because of something you did; that's how Isaiah describes the servant of God in this prophecy. Yet in the very first line of this reading God says, "My servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted." God brought much good from this innocent victim.

The Catholic Church will survive these difficult days, but we will go through what Bishop Robert Finn recently called "this necessary purification." There is no Easter without a Good Friday; this Friday is good, not because of what people did, but because of what Jesus did. We believe that his innocent suffering can still redeem whatever wrong we have done.