

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This week the Vatican released a report after investigating former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and his rise through the ranks of the Catholic Church despite growing accusations of sexual abuse and misconduct. Pope Francis has already dismissed McCarrick from the priesthood. In our diocese, Bishop Johnston released this statement:

“This report has been anticipated for many months and I welcome the additional information which shines the light of truth onto the sins, crimes, and scandals surrounding former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. The news will most certainly be painful to all Catholic faithful and persons of good will across our nation, and here in our diocese. Nonetheless, we are more prepared than ever to combat the serious criminal threat of sexual abuse within the Church, to keep our parishes and schools safe, and to accompany any victim-survivors of abuse who come forward. Over the coming days, I will review the full report and offer additional comment. As I look forward to assuming the role as Chair of the USCCB Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People later this month, I anticipate the report will be of critical value in informing the ongoing reform needed within our Church and making it a safer place for all God’s children, especially the least among us.”

The Vatican’s report shows that several people had accused McCarrick of immoral sexual actions with adult men and criminal sexual behavior with underaged men. Pope John Paul II knew of these accusations, so he sought counsel from trusted advisors in the US and in Europe. The pope personally made the decision to appoint McCarrick to Washington DC, where he became a cardinal. Pope Benedict XVI, who succeeded John Paul, had access to the same information, initially extended McCarrick’s tenure in Washington, but then reversed course and asked him to step down. Both popes believed McCarrick when he told them the allegations were false. Pope Benedict asked McCarrick to maintain a low profile, which he did not do. Pope Francis, in the first years of his papacy, trusted the work of his predecessors, but when he learned of a new credible allegation involving a victim under 18 years of age at the time, Pope Francis asked for McCarrick to resign as a cardinal and opened the investigation whose results are now public. This is a tragic case of church leaders not believing victims. The very people who should have been trustworthy failed to protect the innocent.

St. Paul cautioned the Thessalonians that just when people are saying, “Peace and security,” sudden disaster may fall upon them. But even he did not imagine that the disaster might come from leaders of the church. Paul reminds us we are “children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.” Let us especially stay alert and sober for children in danger of abuse. Let us believe survivors when they have the courage to speak up. If you are a victim of sexual abuse, or if you observe or suspect sexual abuse, call the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline; the number is in our bulletin every week. Also call 911. If the abuse involves clergy, an employee, or a volunteer of our diocese, contact the ombudsman Joe Crayon. His information is also in our bulletin every week.

Sunday, November 15, 2020