

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

(With thanks for the opening idea/words from Fr. Jay Scott Newman)

Whenever a Catholic parish gets word that it will receive a new pastor, there is anticipation... there is excitement... there is much talk... and many secretly think -- maybe at last this one will get it right.... And as the new pastor comes on board, the honeymoon phase begins. Some hearty ones will come forward and will suggest in one form or another... "Thank God you're here...." Which is a not-so-veiled way of saying your predecessor didn't do things our way....

Months go by... the honeymoon ends the pastor has settled in... and then the complaining begins... "He's done such and such to the music ministry..." "He changed the day and time of holding council meetings..." He doesn't want unmarried people who live together to be Eucharistic Ministers...." And in due course -- a person.. or a family or some folks will decide they don't think it's right that the priest makes these kinds of changes... and they decide to leave the congregation. Perhaps they don't like the priest's preaching -- or the priest has done something to change the 'position' a friend had in the parish... These unhappy people come to the realization that he isn't the messiah at all... and they break away and cause division in the Church.

This isn't a Catholic-only phenomenon... it is true in all of Christianity. An older lady of the Baptist faith says that Baptists multiply by dividing. This is called schism (SIZM)... a word which comes from the Greek meaning 'split.' In our usage, schism means division or disunion. It may be big & formal as

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

certain schisms have been throughout the history of the Christian Church... or it may be informal and internal... and I'll come back to that.

Those who study such matters say there are at least 28,000 Christian churches. Today's Protestants agree on virtually nothing.... Marriage which used to be sacred and for all of life is no longer a sacrament -- it's purely a civil matter. In most Christian churches, you can be married a half dozen times with impunity. 75 years ago this wasn't so -- nor was contraception or abortion ever condoned. In one Lutheran Church group -- they had a general membership vote to decide if belief in Christ is necessary for salvation in their faith walk -- and the majority voted NO.... It is enough to make even Luther roll over in his grave!

Since the earliest of Christianity, a man was rightly considered a schismatic when he disregarded the authority of his own bishop. St. Cyprian said, "It must be understood that the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop, and one is not in the church if he is not with the bishop." Long before that, St. Ignatius of Antioch laid down this principle: "Where the bishop is, there is the community, even as where Christ is there is the Catholic Church. The great bishop and Apostle Saint Paul lived in and personally founded the Church at Corinth. He preached the Gospel and formed and organized that Church, first among Jews and then among Gentiles. Eventually, Paul had to leave. Some five years after first visiting Corinth -- Paul was in Ephesus when he received word that things were going wrong in Corinth. The community that Paul gave birth to was dividing among itself and this news gave rise to the two letters Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth. Just before this past Lent, our first readings

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

concentrated on the First Letter to the Corinthians. In that letter, Paul wrote condemning division or schism.

It is the issue of internal schism that I want to spend a little time on today. Through a combination of many factors -- we have a great deal of internal schism. Contributing factors include these: many Catholics are ill-formed in the faith.... they haven't had faith classes since they were in CCD 30, 40 or 50 years ago. Some never received education -- they may have simply imitated the practice of parents or grandparents.

Many people have developed a Protestant mentality -- that is: If I don't like it in this Church... I'll split. And as a measure of how deep their faith is... or isn't... liking the Church means: do I like the pastor? Do I like the deacon or the business manager? Do I like the way the parish is run? Do I like the music? Do they preach about issues that bother me or go against my political views? And if I'm not pleased in one or more ways: I split. This is internal schism.

There is another form of schism: we see it in many so-called Catholic politicians. Faith is what I do on Sundays; the real world is what I live the other 6 days and 23 hours.. Those politicians have created a horrendous problem of scandal -- and those who are weak or poorly catechized in their faith, bring that scandalous ignorance of the politicians inside our very church walls.

In a column in his Madison, Wisconsin Diocesan paper, Bishop Robert Morlino responded to recent events in the following words: "Neither

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

Catholic nuns nor Nancy Pelosi speak for the Catholic Church.” He was teaching about those spreading confusion about the Church’s position on health care reform and right to life issues.

“I cannot pass over the actions of those who have said that what the bishops have taught is false,” said the Bishop. “They said that the recent health care legislation provides an adequate framework for a Catholic to follow his or her conscience about abortion. So, in the media, we had a trade organization — the Catholic Health Association — which calls itself ‘Catholic,’ and we had religious Sisters who call themselves Catholic, saying to the public, ‘Sorry, bishops, you got it wrong, we are saying what is the teaching of the Church.’”

But the U. S. bishops, Morlino said, were “clear” that the Senate healthcare bill passed by the House failed both Catholics and those who adhere to natural law. He explained that God didn’t task female religious or even priests --- no God tasked only bishops with the responsibility to “teach, sanctify, and govern” the Church. The Madison bishop mentioned that the recent Senate bill -- now signed into law had a most serious problem with its lack of stringent conscience protections for health care workers -- and the bill had restrictions on immigrants seeking to buy health insurance. The law mandates that legal immigrants wait five years before they can purchase insurance. This is a situation the bishops said was profoundly unjust.

Now what this homily is about today is schism... great schisms... political schisms.... and local internal schisms. Please listen: Here are examples of schisms and sin that bring about division in the Church...

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

If anyone here is “living” with someone and they are not validly married and acting as a Catholic and receiving the Eucharist...

On the Sabbath, if anyone has, without a valid reason not attended Mass, or in anger or upset gone to some other faith church -- and if you have not sought the sacrament of reconciliation...

If you have been married outside of the Church and you have not had your marriage blessed in the Church AND you are partaking of the Eucharist...

If you are withholding talents (music ministry), money or support for your parish because of factors such as upset with staff or homilies and such...

If anyone has had a divorce and remarriage outside of the church without seeking an annulment and is receiving Holy Communion...

If anyone hearing this hasn't been to Confession in years -- or worse yet, if you've been outspoken telling other Catholics there is no need to go to Confession....

If a person comes to Holy Communion and has not entered into full union with the Catholic Church through our entrance norms...

If anyone here has had an abortion or has assisted someone to procure an abortion....

If someone is here and has publicly supported abortion or politicians who support abortion....

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

If someone has participated in injury to the Body of Christ through factors such as division, gossip or ridicule...

I could go on with further 'IF's' -- but in any instances where someone answers YES, then it is likely they are in some form of schism... and, like so called Catholic politicians, this conduct has probably done grave harm and scandal to the Body of Christ which is the Church. For any who answer YES to these questions, quite likely there is sin... perhaps mortal deadly sin. Those who say YES are living outside of the Catholic Church no matter what you do on Sunday.

If you are troubled or challenged by what you hear today -- please go to St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians -- he said he didn't write to shame them but to admonish... that is to teach them. And today, the greatest admonishment we need is the one leading us back to loving, cohesive union... not a geographical grouping of 500 families who believe whatever they want or think. The Church isn't a democracy. It is run by the faithful bishops -- albeit sometimes in their own brokenness. They are who Christ has allowed as our shepherds. We must follow them.

Open defiance of bishops... open defiance of the most serious of the teachings of the Church, positions someone in the camp of the evil one. "If we go down this road, the teaching authority of the bishops will be further eroded and with it, the authority of Christ's Church." (Bishop Morlino)

Holy John Paul II -- you stood for respect for all human life and you gave us such a wonderful example of what it means to be a loving, faithful and humble Catholic. Pray for us and for the Church you served with every

050210 THE SCANDAL OF SCHISM IN THE CHURCH

living breath you took until the end of your life on earth. Help us to unite under Christ and under the authority of the Church. Amen.