

18th Sunday Ordinary Time
August 4-5, 2018

I have heard the grumbling

Readings: Exodus 16: 2-4, 12-15; Ephesians 4: 17, 20-24; John 6: 24-35

In today's Scriptures we hear all about murmuring and I suspect that most of us can appreciate the corrective being offered to us today. At the time in which the murmuring recounted in the Book of Exodus took place, the Israelites were 4-6 weeks into their journey and were running out of food. In Verse 8: "*Your grumbings are not against us but against the Lord.*" Moses clearly warns the people that they had better be careful- their grumbings are not so much against Moses and Aaron as against the Lord Himself.

The context carries with it the sense of muttering in a low tone, as if we voice our complaint just out of earshot. Jesus knew that his disciples were grumbling in this 6th chapter of John's Gospel. They may have thought they were out of earshot, but He knew their hearts. We know that it is counterproductive to grumble. A complaining spirit that offers nothing constructive towards a solution on how to remedy a situation is useless. The Israelites were unwilling to suffer the inconvenience on the way to the Promised Land. They did not trust that true freedom lay ahead.

Grumbling cannot be an end in itself. If it is ever to be virtuous, it must be in response to some injustice. To call out injustice or identify hypocrisy-as difficult as these are to do- it is desperately needed at times. Well aware of my own shortcomings, I am instinctively am loathe to call out others. Perhaps you feel the same. But there are times when our faith demands precisely that. Here is where you come in today.

Now is a unique moment in the history of our Church in this country, both to be heard as well as to pray for radical conversion to holiness. We pray first and foremost for daily conversion in our own lives. But we also pray collectively for a radical and deepening conversion of heart for all who lead our Church. Why ought we to do this? Because gaining the trust of people can take years, but that trust can be shattered in an instant.

That is both the challenge and the gift of ministry in the Church. Yesterday, we honored St. John Vianney, patron saint of parish priests,

appropriately depicted in a stained glass window, over a confessional. It is the gift that allows me to wake early each day and strive to be an instrument of the love of Jesus. It is balanced by the fear of offending another through an insensitive word, of being short with someone in the confessional, or in not responding quickly enough to a call for help.

The gift of ministry also means present in key moments in people's lives: baptisms, weddings, hospital visits, the long confessional lines we so often see here, and at Sunday Mass. These are just a few of the treasures of this vocation in which I have been proud to serve for more than 29 years. And yet, it is the same promises, if broken, that cause such tremendous harm and damage to the People of God.

In the summer of 2002, the Catholic laity were assured that new policies and protocols were established that provide a much safer environment in which young people could grow in their lives of faith. While there was certainly much truth contained in that promise, there was also a huge gap in accountability for the most senior leaders in the Church, outlined in greater detail in today's bulletin.

I would much rather preach about anything else, even money! But today, the voices of you, the people of God, need to be persistent and clear, voices motivated by a genuine concern for the good of souls and for the needed purification in the Church. I urge you to demand answers as to how warning signs were ignored, and how a culture that remained silent could have been tolerated. In this case, "grumbling" is a matter of justice.

We in the Church would benefit tremendously by recovering a healthy sense of repentance. I am convinced of the value of the Penitential Psalms, a group of seven psalms sprinkled throughout the 150 psalms. I would hope that they could be placed back in the Breviary as a group, where they had been for many years.

Praying these psalms as a group takes about ten-fifteen minutes, and is a worthwhile spiritual exercise that both reminds us of our individual need for forgiveness, as well as offering collective reparation for sins against God's innocent ones. Reparation is prayer that seeks to make amends.

It is my sincere conviction that our very best initiatives in this local Church have been championed and led by the lay faithful. I am thinking of outstanding programs in youth and young adult ministry, work on college campuses, initiatives that have spread throughout the country. We ought to be justifiably proud.

The Church needs you now, more than ever, as lay faithful, both by your prayer and by demanding clear action, to help the Church rebuild trust. Only when the lay faithful are satisfied that every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge and address forthrightly the serious problems that in the Church, ought anyone to rest. May our Lord Jesus purify His Church, strengthen his ministers and build up the Body of Christ.