

## THE CHURCH'S *QUO VADIS* MOMENT: "WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"

According to a late 2nd century A.D. apocryphal account known as the *Acts of St. Peter*, mostly preserved in a 6th century Latin manuscript, a singular incident has remained fixed in the Catholic imagination for centuries since. It surrounds the account in which Saint Peter, found walking alongside a road outside of Rome, fleeing arrest and certain death, comes to a crossroads. That crossroads is where the Appian Way meets the Via Ardeatina, two streets that incidentally are intact and bear the same names today! Peter meets the risen Lord and asks, "*Quo vadis?*" (In English— "Where are you going?"), to which Jesus replies: "*Romam vado iterum crucifigi,*" that is, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again." Peter, of course, turns around, and heads back towards Vatican Hill, where he would be crucified and buried. We all know the rest of the story. The Church of Santa Maria in Palmis (a.k.a. Church of Domine Quo Vadis) stands today at the intersection of the ancient roads, near the entrance to the Catacombs. Sometimes the best lessons are in the details. Jesus meets Peter at a crossroads— which way will he go?

This is a most appropriate image for our own reflection as we close out the month of August. While some people are a bit surprised at the severe fallout following the dual revelations of the then-Cardinal McCarrick scandal (June 20) and the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report (August 14), most people are not. I myself felt all along, from the moment the McCarrick scandal broke, that this might just be the last straw. My earlier bulletin column of August 5 expressed my desire for a solution heavily involving the laity in an investigative audit. So much has happened in the past two months, and frankly it feels like a year! It is appropriate to bring you up to date on some important developments, many quite encouraging, while a few still leave me shaking my head.

I paid close attention to the press releases coming from several dioceses that appeared to have been coordinated. More than one spoke of "shock" in addition to the obvious pain and sadness of misconduct charges being leveled against a high-ranking cleric in the Church. Yes, the revelations were shocking, though as news of prior settlements trickled out, many were anything but shocked at misconduct. In the following weeks, some Church leaders stumbled in a way that can only be described as "tone deaf," unwittingly (or inexplicably) downplaying the severity of the scandal. To be crystal clear— this **is indeed** a massive, massive scandal. How it is handled will be the benchmark for the Catholic Church for at least a generation to come. Following this double punch to the gut of the lay faithful, **this is our Catholic crossroads**, right here, right now. I have tossed and turned many nights, my prayer has been less than stellar, and in my anger I've muttered a few salty words I should not have. Can anyone relate?

That Pope Francis removed McCarrick from the college of Cardinals on July 28 was significant. Recall, only a Pope can discipline a Cardinal— this one did. As Cardinal DiNardo's noted: "I thank the Holy Father for his leadership in taking this important step. It reflects the priority the Holy Father places on the need for protection and care for all our people and the way failures in this area affect the life of the Church in the United States." The Pope's August 20 **Letter to the People of God**, expressed shame and repentance over the revelations. But one phrase stood out for me: "... no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated." The use of "covered up" is a major step forward, but the real issues are much deeper than any one man. There is no place for a homosexual "sub-culture" within the priesthood. If this topic is "off the table" at the November USCCB meeting, I fear that reform efforts will sputter from the starting gate.

So what ought the lay faithful in the pews and we pastors of parishes do? For starters, with heavy heart, we must ask of our Church and her leaders, "Quo vadis?" "Where are you going?" I was heartened by the fact that the Executive Committee of the USCCB met. In their name, Cardinal DiNardo (President of the USCCB) announced plans to "invite the Vatican to conduct an Apostolic Visitation to address these questions, in concert with a group of predominantly lay people..." I was heartened this past Monday evening, when I was privileged to join a group of over 100 young adults who gathered on the Cathedral steps for a **candlelight prayer** service. On their own accord, spreading the word on social media, they prayed Vespers to help deal with the pain in

the aftermath of the scandals in the Church. They came because they love Christ and His Church and want to be part of the solution. God bless them— I hope this is repeated many times in the weeks and months ahead. I encourage prayer of reparation using the seven Penitential Psalms, available in a PDF on our website.

In 2014, all Archdiocesan priest files (past and present) were thoroughly reviewed by an outside firm of lay experts. This Kinsale Management Consulting review makes our Archdiocese among the most compliant in the nation, precisely because the review was completely independent. We priests were simply names on a file folder; they never met us and we never saw them. But that review was needed in order to demonstrate a willingness to be transparent. Could this not happen in every single diocese in our nation? This is neither a time to run away or sink into despair, but rather to rise courageously, while demanding both accountability and purification. The two go hand in hand. May God grant us the strength to undergo purification, so that we may emerge stronger, safer, and more faithful to the call we have received to minister in Christ's name.

- The **World Meeting of Families** in Dublin is expected to draw a capacity crowd of 500,000 for the closing open-air Mass. Over 37,000 attended the three-day congress prior to Sunday's Mass. The WMOF began in 1994 under St. John Paul II. Held every three years, the following cities have hosted: Rome (2x), Rio de Janeiro, Manila, Valencia, Mexico City, Milan and Philadelphia in 2015.
- The game of **baseball is changing**, and I wonder what the greats of old would think? The league batting average is down to .248, (lowest since 1972) with an average of 8.4 strikeouts per game, with as many strikeouts per game as hits. One out of every three at-bats results in either a strikeout, walk or home run. Whither the bunt single or sacrifice fly? In 1971, Hank Aaron had 47 home runs and 58 strikeouts. Current Texas slugger, Joey Gallo has 32 HR's and 169 strikeouts!
- I encourage you to consider becoming **more active** in the parish this fall. I call men and women to consider volunteering as children's catechists, lectors, Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and singers in our Choir. The needs are great in all these areas, but especially great for male vocalists and female lectors. Please consider helping this year. I do not think you will regret it.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector