

Holy Week – April 2006

Dear Chapel friends,

On Holy Thursday we celebrate the institution of the Eucharist as well as the Priesthood. In many parishes the priests in the parish substitute the traditional “Washing of Feet” with a Renewal of their Vows. This year, for me, the celebration of Holy Thursday is bittersweet.

From May 1970 through May 1971 I was assigned as a Deacon to serve an internship in a parish in Roslindale, Massachusetts. In August 1970 one of the priests in the parish arranged to take a teenaged parishioner and myself to a conference in Connecticut. We stayed in homes of the priest’s relatives or friends. On the first night of that trip the priest raped me. Two days later he told me he had no remorse for what had happened, that I had “asked for it,” and that he used to come into my room at the rectory to watch me sleep. On our return to the parish I reported the incident to my priest supervisor. Nothing happened. I called every rape crisis center listed in the yellow pages – no one would talk to me because I was a male. In 1970 only women were considered to be victims of rape. Around February 1971 I told the Seminary there was a “problem in the rectory” and suggested no replacement be sent for me. A replacement was assigned. My only option was to “to live with it.” I did not, could not, tell my family. I’ve learned in the past 4 years that my supervisor had been diagnosed in 1957 with an adolescent psychopathic personality. He had this “thing” for mentally ill teenaged girls – and obviously was still “active” in 1970.

After retiring from the Navy Chaplain Corps (1997,) I could not return to Boston. I had not at that time been able to name my experience. I was assigned here at the Washington Hospital Center on 1 February 1998. From September to early November 2001 I experienced a flashback to the incident and began therapy. By early December I told my family for the first time. In January 2002 I tried to take it back to the Archdiocese of Boston. It took the Cardinal five months to see me. When we met there was no validation that I had been a good priest, or was a good person. I told the Cardinal that my biggest fear was that in not being able to stop the priest, he went on to hurt others. I was told there had been no other allegations against the priest. At the time he was retired. My accusation was investigated, and his faculties were withdrawn. He tried to say that it was mutual, and that I had “asked for it.” The investigation also pointed out that there had been at least two other allegations made – but nothing was done. He is currently 80 years old and preparing for trial for (allegedly) raping an 8-year-old boy just before his First Communion fourteen years ago.

Last summer I shared more detailed thoughts and reactions with my family. My aunt and uncle, both in their late seventies, commented, “It’s a wonder you are still a priest.” In therapy I was dealing with my rationalizations of staying in ministry. For nearly 35 years I’ve rationalized that the little good that I can do would offset the evil done to me.

However, during the past four years of the clergy abuse crisis I've seen more and more cases of Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals covering up their actions of moving abusive priests from parish to parish, and even diocese to diocese.

The theology of "apostleship" is that the one who is sent more than represents the sender – he actually "becomes" the sender. With this understanding, a priest is "sent" by the local bishop to preach the Word. In essence we "become" the bishop – and represent and stand for all that they say and do. I can no longer "represent" these bishops who are protecting things of this world (checkbooks, stock portfolios, etc.) and ignoring the basic Christian need to bring Justice and Reconciliation to victims. The bishops have pointed the finger at abusive priests, and rightly so. However, they have done NOTHING to look at themselves and take responsibility for the evil they have brought to the church. The Bishop of Joliet, Illinois gave a deposition last summer that was demoralizing. He had no idea of the number of priests who had allegations against them. He had no remorse, nor took any responsibility for moving predatory pedophile priests from parish to parish. In the Archdiocese of Chicago last summer (August 2005) a priest had an allegation of abuse raised against him. The Cardinal assigned a priest to monitor the abusive priest – but over Labor Day weekend the monitor was away, and the abusive priest took three teenagers on a weekend trip. The priest was not removed from ministry until he was arrested in January 2006. Unfortunately, there was another child abused in December. The Cardinal of Chicago (George) was the primary composer of the so-called "charter to protect children" that the American bishops adopted in Dallas in June 2002. Cardinal George did not follow the course of action set out in the charter, nor did he follow the rules of his own diocese. The president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has had an accusation levied against him. According to the "Charter" any priest who is accused is temporarily removed from ministry until the accusation is proven to be credible or not. Cardinal Skylstad has refused to step down. Dioceses in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere have claimed bankruptcy, claiming that the diocese does not "own" their parishes – so as to reduce the financial resources of the diocese in assessing damages. They are more concerned with the things of this world than they are in simple Christian Justice.

If you cannot understand what a victim experiences I highly recommend the movie "Twist of Faith." It is an HBO documentary that was nominated for an academy award. It was released on DVD in February 2006 and is available through www.amazon.com for approximately \$19 plus shipping. It was shown recently to a group of interested people. There were two of us as victims who were with them. At the end, we were asked our opinion. The other guy said, "Move it from Toledo to Philadelphia, and that's my story." I said, "Change the age from 14 to 25, and that's my story." It is accurate and reflects well what a victim of sexual abuse experiences.

I am being granted a "medical disability" based on chronic Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and chronic depression. As recently as December 2005 I dreamed of the rape and actually "felt" the priest's skin on mine. As for the depression, I disguise it well – my "outgoing personality" is a cover-up. According to my therapist, I've probably been depressed since the rape (35 years ago) but since there was no one to talk to about it, I

believed I was “normal.” By nature I am very much a loner – and an introvert. For me to be “outgoing” takes a LOT of emotional energy.

Effective 31 May 2006 I will be leaving active ministry. It is difficult to leave – I have loved serving the church, but I cannot go against my conscience in standing up to the bishops in calling for them to take responsibility.

Thank you for being supportive of me while I have been here for the past 8 plus years. Please know that you will be in my prayers as you care for the sick – and I simply ask that you remember me occasionally in your prayers as well.

God bless you all.