

On Behalf Of Thomas Prendergast
Sent: Tuesday, January 11, 2011 4:51 PM
Subject: Important Message from Fr. Waters

Fr. Waters asked me to email you the following letter. Thomas Prendergast

To: School Community
From: Fr. Waters

The recent controversy continues to disturb the peace of our school. Of course it is tempting for me to want to defend myself against the baseless and false denunciations of my sacred ministry. I know that my relative silence has caused consternation to some and has unnerved the good people who want to come to my defense. However the Dioceses statement although well written, correct in every way and delivered sincerely had no effect on parents and did not cause them to relent. My own statement although also carefully written, correct and sincerely meant to assure parents has been ignored as a form letter and hiding behind the seal.

I cannot defend myself against these accusations without revealing the contents of individual confessions thus doing grave harm to the individual penitents and forever weakening the Sacrament in the eyes of others. I will not be the cause of this harm for any reason even to prevent the destruction of my good name or the loss of my priestly ministry.

I can not say what happened in the confessional other than it was wholly appropriate. With God alone before my eyes I can tell you that I have nothing for which to feel guilty or embarrassed. I acted in the person of Christ and in the name of the Church exactly as I should have; seriously and with great attention. I was a gentle and compassionate confessor as I always am. As I have told the children on multiple occasions in preparing them for the sacrament: I have no interest in their sins. My experience has taught me that all sinfulness is ordinary, mundane and boring. My focus as a confessor is always contrition, the purpose of amendment and the grace of God that allows us to uproot our sins from our life. This was my focus on that very day and as always my confessions were brief and to the point. I heard over 50 confessions in the span of an hour and half.

But this is about more than me. This is about our faith and the Sacrament that greatly aides Christians to come to full stature and once mature in their faith to actively pursue holiness. Even if these unfortunate accusations were true: That a priest asked about the appropriate use of the internet or about involvement in sins against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue; what would be so shocking about that? These are real spiritual challenges for our youth. As you can well imagine the innocent consciences of our young people are often troubled by them. Young penitents often seek help in the confessional about these very topics and in the vernacular of their youthful conversations.

If children were surprised that confessors would examine the consciences of penitents on matters of this kind as well as on Mass attendance and the other commandments and precepts of the Church it bespeaks more the lack of faithful preparation than an error on

the part of the confessor. I know that all the children I prepare for the sacrament have been instructed to make a thorough examination of conscience and state plainly all and whatever sins they have committed so as to have the greatest possible human experience of Gods mercy and healing power. I encourage them to review the Catechism of the Catholic Church and go over the list of sins that may be applicable to them under each of the commandments. I remind them that in the confessional they are speaking to their Father in Heaven, not to me; and their Father who sees in secret will not condemn them whatever their sin.

Of course questions that are delicate must be posed prudently and with respect to the childs age and condition in life. Confessors must defer to the sovereignty of the childs conscience, however young, as to what are the serious sins needing to be confessed or not. But if these delicate questions can never appropriately arise from the context of the confessed sins and be discussed to aide the young person in the development of their conscience that means that a priest with the full care of souls must ignore his role as physician and judge before God. To do this would imperil his own soul and lead the children astray.

If these erroneous opinions about the immorality of speaking to the penitents in the spiritual and moral context of their manifestation of conscience are not corrected then I can not see how I can hear the confessions of children in the future with safety. Nor could I ask my brother priests to subject themselves to the same moral danger.

And what are we to do about our children and their consciences? Are they now to believe that sins against the sixth commandment are so heinous and shameful that they are unspeakable even to a priest in confession? Or are they to believe that these sins pose no risk to their souls and should be freely embraced as meaningless vices? If I were a young person witnessing this hysterical reaction to what seems at worst a poorly placed question and at best a confessor zealous for souls, I would be terribly confused. If a young person is led to believe that a priest of the Church who they have been taught to look upon as a Spiritual Father must be cast out of the Church because he dared to mention in the course of his sacred ministry those sins that are talked about freely all the time among the children and in every form of social communication to which they are exposed, I would be very concerned for their future in the faith.

In the end people will believe what they will believe. For those who genuinely know me and my character no proof of my priestly virtue is necessary. For those who have chosen to vilify me in this way I am convinced no proof will suffice. I am praying to persevere in the truth, to forgive and bless those who are treating me as the enemy, and that I may learn to rejoice that I have been found worthy to suffer for the gospel. I am offering the personal hardships and sacrifices during this period to God through the intercession of St. Jude the Apostle with the intention that he will protect our childrens faith in Sacraments and Holy Mother Church from this reckless calumny.
