

Fr. O'Connor's Homily - January 6, 2019
Feast of the Epiphany

One day when St. Francis of Assisi went out to meditate in the fields he was passing by the Church of San Damiano which was old and collapsing. Inspired by the Spirit he went in to pray.

Kneeling before an image of Jesus, crucified, he was filled with great fervor and consolation as he prayed. While his terrified eyes were gazing at the cross, he heard a voice coming from the cross, telling him three times, "Francis, go and repair my house which is falling into ruin."

Trembling with fear, Francis was amazed at the sound of this astonishing voice. He was alone in the church, and as he received in his heart the power of the divine words, he fell into a state of ecstasy. Returning to his senses he put his whole heart into obeying the command he received. He began zealously to repair the church building, although the intention of the words referred to that Church which Jesus purchased with His own blood as the Holy Spirit afterward made him realize. You see the Church in those days was corrupt and rocked with scandals. The year was 1204.

Recently I received this magazine in the mail. It's called The Priest. The entire issue is devoted to the "Clergy abuse crises". It is offered as a "special resource in a time of crises." We have all been wounded scandalized by this abuse crises.

Accompanied by this is the loss of our youth. So many just do not participate in the Mass and there is the closing and merging of churches and schools. We are being humiliated. It's like the Church in the time of St. Francis.

In today's first reading Isaiah writes "...darkness covers the earth and thick clouds cover the peoples." In the Gospel we read of the machinations of the deceitful King Herod who lies to the Magi and ultimately orders the slaughter of the Innocent Children.

Our Church is staggering under all this weight, all this evil but here is what gives me Hope; St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians writes, "...I glory in infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions, in distress for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul boasted in his weakness because it brought God into his life with stunning power. Paul became an empty vessel and Christ lived through him accomplishing amazing things.

Pope Francis was recently reported to have said that 2% of Catholic clergy are pedophiles (child abusers). Dr. Michael Seto a clinical and forensic psychologist at the Royal Ottawa Healthcare Group estimates that 5% of the general population are pedophiles. Nevertheless, even the abuse of one child is far too much, especially in the Church.

The clergy abuse crises has exposed a horrible weakness in the Church but St. Paul makes it clear. I hope, I believe, that this weakness, this sin which has been exposed in our church will bring God into our life, into the life of the Church with stunning power. The people, the Church who walk in darkness will see a great light, a great renewal.

I may not live to see it but I am still filled with hope.