

I don't know how many of us present here at Mass today have paid much attention to the news on the scandalous acts of bishops and cardinals, not only here in the United States but around the world. As a member of the clerical state I have been following this news for the past several weeks very closely, and before you and God I need to apologize – I've spent **WAY** too much time with it, and I need to get back to the work of being available to you, the People of God.

I will say this, though; if you have been paying attention to the readings over the past couple of weeks, both those on Sundays and the weekdays, the connections Jesus makes about the scribes and Pharisees in the ways they conduct their lives in relation to the people they are to shepherd, you would think he was talking to us about the events happening in His Church today, about WOLVES in SHEPHERDS clothing. And we are left to ponder what is worse – the criminal acts or the scandalous coverups.

Today we hear Jesus chastising the Pharisees and scribes telling them, "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." They pay lip-service to God, while making very comfortable their own lives. Jesus does NOT mince words, no parable for folks to wonder what he really means. The Pharisees appear to be aghast at the disciples feeding themselves before first washing their hands, a man-made TRADITION which they would say is EQUAL to the Laws handed down to them by Moses. Jesus is quick to point out that it is not something outside the body that defiles it, but that which comes from within.

For 2000 years external forces have tried to destroy the Church, the Body of Christ. The high priests and Pharisees sent Saul, whom Jesus converted and renamed Paul, to arrest and

persecute the early Christians. The Romans who spent nearly 300 years trying to eradicate the Christian sect because they wouldn't bow to the Roman gods. And in our own recent history of Communist, Fascist, and Socialist regimes persecuting their own peoples who defied government edicts **not** to believe in God, but in what the State can do for them – or **TO** them.

Although external forces have yet to prevail over the destruction of the Church, she has also had to contend with the destructive internal forces within its hierarchy, even with bad popes. Jesus fully understands the evil desires of mans' hearts: the **WANT** to be **FIRST**, the **THIRST** for **POWER**, the desire to be a **PRINCE** among paupers. With all the bad press to which the Church has opened itself up over the past millennium - the schisms, the heresies, the personal scandals - through it all the Church prevails, the Body of Christ lives.

The Body of Christ **lives**. **How?** Simply because it **IS** the Body of Christ who already died **ONCE**, and lives, and can die no more. The same body Saul was persecuting when Jesus stopped and chastised him on his way to Damascus. Even though He died, He lives, even today in this body of believers.

The words of St James too are prophetic. He admonishes us "to keep oneself **unstained** by the world", and this is accomplished by being "doers of the word and not hearers only." Not so much an easy task for any ordinary human being, not even for those who would be saints, yet also not impossible if we try to keep ourselves in tune with the **WORD** and not be hypocrites who hear the word but decide for themselves that it does not apply to them, as was the case of the scribes and Pharisees, and is the case with many in the Church hierarchy today.

Not all Catholics are in denial that the Church is **in the midst** of a massive, massive, crisis, and many good Catholics feel the shame by association to this crisis and wonder where should we go, where can we find the truth?

I tell you this, the truth is where it has always been, in the Word of God. God's commandments have not changed. The promise of Jesus to remain with His church has not been broken. There are still good shepherds who will stand up to the wolves in shepherd's clothing to protect and lead the flocks, theirs and others if necessary. And behind the scenes, out of the spotlight of disgraceful headline news, the good deeds the Catholic Church does around the world today, especially for those most in need due to man-made or natural disasters, continues, because that is the Will of God for Catholics today and every day.

In all of this I would ask that we look back to last week's gospel when Jesus says to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter speaks out for not only the Twelve, but for us here today, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life."

As much as the body may hurt, it can be healed. Pray to strengthen the hearts and wills of the good shepherds. Pray for reconciliation and the **change** of hearts for those shepherds who have lost their way. And pray to the Mother of God, Mary Most Holy, for her intercession, to cleanse the Body of Christ, just as every good mother bathes her child.