

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

# The Parish Paper

OF  
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.33 No.30

The Eve of The Nativity of St. John's

06/23/02

## Sorrow

The German philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel used this word to characterize the experience of much of human history. It is sadly appropriate for us now with the recent nightmare of the Roman Catholic Church.

I know there are other words that apply in this case: shock, anger, fear, dismay, in-justice, and a host more; but to look squarely both at the scandal of Priests abusing young children, and at the Church's lack of wisdom and of justice in dealing with it, evokes profound sorrow.

Our Lord was quite clear when it came to abusing children in any form. "And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" When the offense comes through the Church, it is dark indeed.

I have no interest in commenting on the deliberations of the Roman Catholic Bishops. Given enormous political pressure, they must try to see clearly to enact proper justice, as well as mercy, and to do so on a case-by-case basis. They must keep their eyes focused on Christ, and not on worldly opinion and political polls.

But I do want to say this. Our Lord entrusts the sacred care of children to His Church. St. Mark records that when some parents of young children brought them to Jesus for him to touch them, the disciples, preoccupied with the importance of Jesus' mission, tried to keep the children and their parents out of the way. When Jesus saw what was going on, he rebuked what appears to us to have been the shortsighted-ness and arrogant self-importance of the disciples. After the rebuke, Jesus took the opportunity to exalt the children as an example of the eagerness that all people should have, no matter what age, to enter the Kingdom of God. And then Jesus took them up in His arms and blessed them.

The following prayer, from the Prayer Book (page 43), sums up the sacred trust, which is given to the Church for children. "O Lord Jesus Christ, who dost embrace children with the arms of thy mercy, and dost make them living members of thy Church; Give them grace we pray thee, to stand fast in thy faith, to obey thy word, and to abide in thy love; that, being made strong by thy Holy Spirit, they may resist

temptation and overcome evil, and may rejoice in the life that now is, and dwell with thee in the life that is to come; through thy merits, O merciful Savior, who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest one God, world without end. Amen”.

Children depend on those who nurture them in body and in soul. Indeed, they are perhaps, for the longest period of time, the most dependent of all creatures on their parents. So when this physical and spiritual need is neglected or abused it is one of the gravest of sins. What a profound sorrow the Church has brought upon many souls, and therefore on the whole Church.

The sorrow of the Roman Church is not peculiar to them. The Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia is making sure that all paid personnel involved with youth have “training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings.” At least one of the Baptist denominations is addressing the same problem. I have no doubt that schools and other institutions are making the same effort. It simply must be done.

There are, however, two caveats to this encounter with our sorrow. First, is that while we must work on prevention, and execute justice where we are sure it is needed, we must not turn our sorrow into a witch-hunt. I believe that most of us will look at this sin seriously, and deal with it responsibly. But some will find abuse where it does not exist, and there will be undue heartache and confusion. We are bound by justice itself to be careful and deliberate in our approach. Then we must act where action is needed.

The second caveat has to do with another moral problem. And that is the absence of moral outrage in areas other than child abuse. While there are others, I offer two examples.

For instance, people in general are not offended with the casual sexual behavior of adults, either with couples living together, or with serial marriages (which have a direct relation to a prior habit of casual cohabitation.) The common reaction of our culture and of many churches is to be silent and non-judgmental when it comes to what we now call, stupidly, “relationships,” or divorce, or remarriage. What is deemed most important is that individuals do whatever they want in order to be happy. And by happiness most mean today’s emotion, and tomorrow’s desire. Divorce and remarriage are a matter of private whim, and not many, including Christians, know what is at stake, or care to know.

To take the subject of moral aberration out of the sexual realm, we might turn to the utter filth that fills our ears in the preferred use of profanity. One can hear this especially in the media of popular music, and of film. Our minds and hence our words have become mirrors of the sewer and of perversity. Violence and insolence and disrespect are the common currency of our thoughts. And no one seems much to care. We are all deceived if we think that this rottenness is not part of the air we breathe.

Caveats like these are useless unless they are heeded. But alas, these problems are now so deeply embedded in our culture, that repentance and a better mind will come only through grace. Sadly, as with the Roman Church, such grace often comes only after we have suffered the consequences of our sins. It is a bitter but universal experience for

us all.

And so we must pray for grace, that God will pour down the abundance of His mercy on us, and that He will use our suffering for our good and for His glory. We can have real hope that He will do so, as He already has, for Jesus was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, and He said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

send this

bookmark

print

close

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.