

Nov. 4, 2018

Thoughts from the pastor,

Here I am at Thursday again and it is time for this letter. This particular Thursday is the Feast of All Saints so I am asking their help in writing this. They have gone through so much in order to get to where they are now, that they should be able to help me to put all of this on paper again. Six years ago I was writing about all of this. I don't know if what I said back then was as helpful as it needed to be but I do know that at least a third of our parish are new since then so I am going to explain all of this again, to the best of my ability.

After I presented the situation with Fr. Don at the Masses last week the biggest question that I heard is why a person waits so long before telling the authorities. Since I have no idea who the person was that accused Fr. Don I am going to cover all the bases. I hope that this will help in understanding many of the other cases that are coming up at this time. Most of these perspectives come from having worked with victims over the years.

I will start with the case of a minor female. There are two things to cover. The first is if the minor did not want the advances. It would have confused the child. Most children do not expect to be treated badly by adults. The advances by the adult would have created suspicion of many adults because the child now feels vulnerable and hurt. They don't like that feeling and definitely don't want it to happen again, but who do they tell? When a priest was the one to put them in this situation they can't go to their priest to speak of their pain. Because the priest is usually seen as a "pillar of the community" they would be hesitant to go to a teacher, especially if the priest was in charge of the school they attend and therefore the trusted boss of the teachers. Children do not normally have any relationship with law-enforcement officials so that would just be scary and not even likely to be on their mind. That leaves the obvious choice of the parents. The parents have always been the ones who brought the child to the priest so this would have caused hesitation. Depending on their age that might have been enough to keep them from revealing this. But if they were young and did reveal it to a parent it would be likely that the parent would brush it off as a young child's imagination. If they were a teenager, the young girl would be worried that her dad would over-react and blame her for things like wearing revealing clothing. The other possibility would be the fear that her dad would kill the priest.

So the child holds this in and doesn't have any way to understand what it means to heal from this hurt. They stuff it down deep. When she starts dating it will come up again. Does she tell her boyfriend? Not likely since she would be afraid he would dump her, or if he wasn't a solid young man, might blab it to everyone and she would feel victimized again. Does she open up when she is getting married? So do and some don't, but even if they do, it seldom goes anywhere because it would ruin the joy of the wedding plans. Does she reveal it when she has children? Of course not, because she does not want her children to have this kind of fear.

All of this is why decades can go by before it comes out, and even then it is terrifying because they have no proof and might be seen as delusional. The opening that makes this person willing to go public is when they see that others have come forward. The "Me too" movement helped with that. I mentioned that there was another scenario in which the young girl actually appreciated the advances. She might have actually appreciated the attention. Because of the insecurity that many young girls feel, this is often the case and is also why they can so easily end up in an abusive relationship with a boyfriend. The fact that she appreciated the advances might have meant that she had no reason to tell anyone about them. But in our current climate of abuse cases in the news, she might have second thoughts. She could realize that what she had experienced was not good at all.

When she finally figures out that this same person, who gave this sexual attention to her, might have been just starting in a life of predatory behavior; she might want to check it out by telling her story to make sure that no one else was victimized more seriously but the person she was involved with years ago.

If the young person was male there is a whole different mentality. The last thing a young boy wants to be seen as is weak. Being a victim is seen as a reminder of how weak and inadequate they might already be feeling. They don't want to reveal this to anyone, ever. But it doesn't end there. The questions of why the adult chose them would eat at them. Their first question would not be why this male adult was attracted to young boys. Their first question would more likely be why are they attractive to men? This would bring up all sorts of gender confusion. This gender confusion has the potential to make the boy question if they are homosexual. Or worse it may eat at them long enough that they find their own sexual desires turning toward the abuse of other boys younger than they are.

These scenarios are all very generic. Every person is unique and their reasoning is their own. I am not writing this information for the purpose of explaining all cases. But there is one thing that is a reality in all of these cases. These are victims. What has happened to them is terrible and scars them seriously. This is why the church must be committed to help these victims. The Archdiocese of Omaha has the *Victim Outreach and Prevention Office* for this purpose. Those phone numbers are 888-808-9055 or 402-827-3795.

But the Catholic Church also has a responsibility for those who have abused others. On the cross Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus said to the crowd who was going to stone the woman caught in the act of adultery: "Let the one without sin cast the first stone." Every one of our sins hurts someone. Even the ones that we think only hurt the sinner, still hurts the Body of Christ for we are all meant to be a part of it. The biggest example of this is suicide. That hurts far more people than just the ones who killed themselves. We commit sin because we have been tainted by sin. We can only be healed by the love of Christ, which we as members of his body are meant to show. That is why we comfort and heal the victims and try to help the abuser back to holiness.

But the other critical thing that the church works on is to try to keep everyone safe. With all the scandals that have come up in the last decades it is obvious that we have not done a good enough job with that safety issue. This is why more people must be involved in this process. The most difficult thing is to do this without bringing further hurt to the victims. That can easily happen as we try to work on helping the abuser. The very information that can help bring the abuser back to holiness and keep other people safe can be the thing that breaks the confidentiality of the victim. It is a tricky balance. The bishops of our world are going to be working on that issue. The USCCB or United States Council of Catholic Bishops will be praying about that this month. Pray for them.

This weekend the second collection is for disaster relief for 2018. The *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* would like us to take up a collection to help them help those who have been hit by the two hurricanes and other areas of natural disasters. Next weekend the second collection will be for the three food pantries that Catholic Charities run. We have done this before and it is called: *Hunger doesn't take a Vacation.*"

God bless you,
Fr. Frank