It is the priesthood of Christ we all share

Recent headlines about the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church are so overwhelming that one can’t escape them even if one is not a news junkie. As a seminarian for five years and a future priest within one year, this issue is particularly personal to me. I hope that by writing this commentary, you would see how the abuse issue may impact a young man’s life as he prepares to enter ministry.

We are proud of our Catholic tradition; if not, we would probably no longer remain Catholics. Sometimes we ask why, and the Church has stated because God has a defensive tendency whenever the Church is being exposed for its faults. We quickly compare this type of response as a negative, but this sounds plausible for people of faith, it doesn’t make any sense for anyone else. Yes, Christ was persecuted and killed, yet he was innocent of sin. In contrast, the Church made mistakes, or committed crimes, depending on how you look at the abuse issue. Once we stop comparing a crisis in the Church to any kind of situation in the world’s history (e.g., a medical biographical evaluation by a psychologist-therapist, two interviews with the archbishop and seminary, as well as receiving recommendations from both clergy and lay people), we want to make sure our candidates are capable of having a family and a life that won’t be disturbed by a default because of physical or psychological defects. We had to pass a training course on sexual abuse and attend workshops dealing with the abuse issue. It’s tragic that some in the priesthood committed the most despicable crime and sin involving minors.

We should be vigilant, not hysterical, by training children in our parishes so they can be aware of what is going on. Sometimes, hysteria sets in and the church is accused of focusing too much on the issue, and parishioners might feel their children are receiving training in an area that should be reserved for parents.

It is the priesthood of Christ we all share, not just the people on the altar. I am aware of many reform-oriented Catholic groups that call for the repeal of mandatory celibacy in the priesthood as one solution to the abuse crisis. Statistically, abuse happens at a higher percentage in the general population, and it doesn’t limit itself to going unheard. The repeal of celibacy argument is invalid and unsound. The solutions, perhaps, are better formation of seminarians, stricter enforcement of the law, and on-going spiritual training for our priests. Personally, I don’t see the Church forcing me to become celibate before I get ordained, but rather, I believe I can live a healthy and holy celibate life, and the Church invites me to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

As I approach ordination, I don’t see a halo glowing above my head, yet I see a dark storm gathering. I pray that this dark storm of the abuse scandal would turn into a big rain of holy water, that would wash away the sin in the church and in my heart. After the rain, the Easter flowers of the priesthood may blossom and give fragrance to a world seeking for meaning and in need of the Resurrection. In this St. Luke’s account, the angels asked the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.” (Lk 24:5). We are a Church of hope and of the Resurrection. We should not look for the meaning of the priesthood among the headlines, but we should look at Christ, because we have “such a high priest, holy, blameless, unainted, separated from sinners, [and] exalted above the heavens” (Heb 7:26).

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