

## Pastor's Column

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### We Are Being Forced to Our Knees

*This is the fifth in a series of perspectives that I am providing on the clergy sexual abuse crisis that continues to grip the Church.*

*There will be a sixth perspective next week, and then on Pentecost Sunday, May 23, I will conclude this series with my own personal thoughts.*

*Here is a list of the previously published perspectives in our Parish Bulletin:*

*"What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?"*

*by Deacon Greg Kendra, April 11, 2010;*

*"Why I Remain a Catholic"*

*by Elizabeth Scalia, April 18, 2010;*

*"The Catholic Church's Catastrophe"*

*by Peggy Noonan, April 25, 2010;*

*"Homily at the Easter Vigil, April 3, 2010"*

*by Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, May 2, 2010.*

*If you have not yet read these, I would encourage you to do so. They are available on our Parish website: [www.stmoside.org](http://www.stmoside.org).*

*I now share with you the words of Bishop Raymond Luecker taken from a column that he wrote in 1993 entitled, "We Are Being Forced to Our Knees." Bishop Luecker, who died in 2002, was the Ordinary of the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota for 25 years. These were, and are, very prophetic words, considering that they were penned 17 years ago!*

*His words are a reminder that our Church Leadership's attention to clergy abuse was and is very uneven. There are Bishops who began to address the issue many years ago, and, for some, it is only a recent concern that they are now beginning to face.*

These are difficult times for the Church that we all love...We see confusion and dissent, religious ignorance, quarreling among ourselves, decrease in attendance at Mass, people alienated and dropping out, an ever-growing shortage of priests, struggle over gender issues, and sexual misconduct.

I would like to focus on one issue: public scandals by the clergy and others in the Church, especially over the issue of sexual abuse of minors. All too often, Church Leaders have failed to recognize the nature and severity of such abuse, have simply not known what to do about it. As a consequence, response from such leaders has looked like covering up, denial. Attempts at damage control have taken the form of manipulation of the press, have resulted in

lack of concern for victims, families and for parish communities. We need to acknowledge what we don't know, and apologize for acting like we did know. We are still disciples and need to be taught, need to learn. We have to acknowledge institutional sinfulness.

I believe we are being forced to our knees, forced to recognize that we are not in charge, but rather God is in charge of the Church. We are being forced to recognize that we are human. We are coming to acknowledge and admit that as a Church (not just as individuals) we have made mistakes. We have a hard time admitting this. Suppose we come to a point where through these scandals we lose all of our savings. Suppose in the process we lose power, prestige, and control. We are not perfect. We are sinful people. We can't solve all the problems. We have to live with ambiguity and gray areas. We are vessels of clay.

We will then come to recognize that we are servants. Jesus showed us how to rule by washing the feet of others. He told us that the princes of this world lord it over others, but it is not to be this way with us. We are called to be servants and to wash one another's feet. Yes, we are being called to our knees. I believe this applies especially to our Bishops, who for so long have carried the trappings of feudal lords with all the titles and dress and privileges that go along with it. It seems to me that we are being forced to recognize that we do not have much power, and that is all right. We are called to be ministers of the word, of the worship of God, and the service of others. We come before the Lord and cry out "I am alone and afraid. I am surrounded by those who hate me. Everything is gone."

We come to a point where we admit we are powerless—our lives have become unmanageable—and there is a power greater than ourselves. We come before God and cry out, "Lord, you are my God. I need you." All of us, Church Leaders and the Faithful, are called to accept the Lord as the center of our lives. I am speaking of dependence on God, daily conversion, coming before the Lord in faith and prayer, seeking mercy and forgiveness. I hope and pray that through the grace of God we will be able to respond to the present scandals in the Church, reach out in love and healing to victims, reach out in forgiveness and reconciliation to perpetrators, and come before the Lord as a community of believers to recognize our need.

*Fr. Mike*