

## Discipleship - Cutting and Plucking; Not for the Complacent

- I. Bishop Robert Barron, Word on Fire, has said,

“The Gospels reminds us that the gate to life is narrow, precisely because it is in the very shape of Jesus Himself, and entrance through the gate involves conforming ourselves to Jesus and His way of life. This path of love is traveled by taking up one's cross every day.” (<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/the-narrow-gate/5249/>)

  - a. Keep that image in your mind's eye
- II. Today's Gospel calls on us to ask, “What keeps us from conforming to the image of Christ?”
  - a. A desire for power? Acceptance? Comfort? Money or honors? Over-reliance on easy grace? Complacency?
  - b. Whatever it is, Jesus calls upon us today to cut it off, pluck it out, and throw it away, that we might pass through the narrow gate of life.
- III. Look for a moment at our Crucified and Resurrected Image of Jesus over our altar, and imagine it as the gate to life.
  - a. To pass through, the disciple must conform to both the jubilant, resurrected Christ, and the crucified Christ
  - b. It is far too easy to rejoice in the resurrection, while ignoring the gift of self in sacrifice
  - c. A Disciple – and a Church – too jubilant, too triumphant, may be tempted toward:
    - i. Self-righteousness, over-confidence, and complacency
- IV. Today's Gospel
  - a. Jesus describes life of discipleship that is far from complacent
  - b. In today's Gospel, Jesus calls on us His disciples
  - c. To actively examine our lives
  - d. Seek out what causes us to sin
  - e. And cut it off, or pluck it out

- V. In a world gone astray of God's Design,  
in a world where we replace the love of God with a love of our  
own passions and desires,  
we must pick up our cross, sacrifice our passions and desires,  
and restore communion with God and one another.
- VI. **In a fallen world, there can be no communion without sacrifice.**
- a. Not one of us here is completely conformed to the image of Christ
  - b. Not one of us is fitting easily through the cross-shaped, narrow gate
  - c. Not one of us is like St. Francis, whose feast we celebrate this week – so conformed to Christ that he bears Christ's wounds, and that all of nature sees Christ in him, and is at peace with him.
  - d. Like the disciples in the Gospel, We all have cutting and plucking to do!
  - e. This is the disciple's daily task, to begin each day
  - f. Not just Sunday, the Lord's Day, but every day
  - g. Focused on the life of Christ, studying the life of the Master, His way of loving
  - h. And ask in prayer, "What keeps me from loving like Christ?",
  - i. To end each day examining the day in prayer
  - j. To not just take our life as a disciple as seriously as we do all other aspects of our life, but to make it our life, and resolve to love and follow Christ first and foremost,
  - k. Daily, resolutely, and attentively, and to take the difficult steps, cut off, pluck out the false passions, wants, and desires, that keep us from Loving like Christ.

1. In a fallen world, there can be no communion, no conformity to Christ, without sacrifice.
- VII. And in a fallen Church, there can be no communion, no conformity to Christ, without sacrifice.
- VIII. Since the Pennsylvania Grand Jury, we have addressed the sexual abuse crisis in our Church every Sunday, every Homily.
  - a. I perfectly understand that some of us may be growing weary of the issue
  - b. But this is why we continue to speak out:
- IX. A friend of mine at work who survived
  - a. 80% casualties of his unit in Viet Nam
  - b. A lifetime of service to our country in the most hazardous conditions
  - c. Survived two terrorist attacks, one of which killed all his colleagues but himself
  - d. “Facing the most difficult challenge of my life, and I don’t know what to do or how to survive.”
- X. Wife of 30 years
  - a. Controlled depression
  - b. Confronted her mother and siblings with the sexual abuse she endured at the hands of a relative, and was rejected
  - c. The last four weeks she has been in a downward spiral
  - d. Suicidal, cycling through extreme moods and personalities, being confrontational at times, childlike at others.
  - e. She, her husband, and their children – all their lives are at a standstill, as they deal with her mental state daily.
- XI. Since the sexual abuse crisis began
  - a. We’ve heard people say we should pray for our priests
  - b. We’ve heard, “Pray for our bishops, they are under attack from Satan”

- i. Really? The devil made them do it?
  - c. The bishops may be tempted by hell, but the victims are living in it.
- XII. The victims are why we are in this together, and I agree we must pray for our priests and bishops, but first, pray for the victims and their families.
- XIII. **In a fallen Church, there can be no communion without sacrifice.**
  - a. **Today's Gospel asks us as Church, "What are we willing to sacrifice? What are we willing to cut off, pluck out, throw away, to conform our Church more fully to Christ?"**
- XIV. Last week Fr. Keith offered us a bit of perspective on our current crisis
  - a. This week, I would like to further that emphasis on perspective, and offer a vision of hope
- XV. The Boy Scouts of America have traveled the same path we are on now
  - a. Credible reports of sexual abuse were either ignored or covered up
  - b. Professional offenders were moved out of Councils, Volunteers removed, but free to volunteer elsewhere.
  - c. Lawsuits and legal action revealed a crisis to the public, severely damaging trust in the organization
- XVI. Initial reactions by the individual councils paralleled our own dioceses
  - a. Some cooperated, and opened their records to law enforcement, as we continue to do here in the Archbalt
  - b. Others grudgingly cooperated after legal action
  - c. Some continued to cover, and were severely sanctioned through the court of law

- XVII. The steps the Boy Scouts took parallel our journey
- a. Listening sessions with the volunteers and victims
  - b. Engagement with victims for reparation, and cooperation with law enforcement to enforce justice.
  - c. Changes to policies and procedures to protect youth
  - d. Finally, restoring faith and trust by instituting fundamental change to the organization itself.
- XVIII. The last step, restoring faith and trust through Institutional Change, required the Boy Scouts, in the words of today's Gospel, To engage in Cutting and plucking, asking what should be sacrificed to better fulfill its mission.
- a. The Old Mission Statement: in part:
  - b. To prepare young men to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes – through the association of men of good character . . . .
  - c. That program worked for many young men, like myself
  - d. Scoutmaster– one-on- relationship
  - e. Camping, hiking, his home, his work at the firehouse
  - f. Next to my dad, the man I admire most
- XIX. Like so many things, this feature of the Boy Scouts program that could be the source of so much good for many, nonetheless was also the temptation to great evil for a few
- XX. Cherished or not, it had to be sacrificed, cut out, thrown away.
- XXI. After listening to the volunteers, this year:
- a. The Boy Scouts of America took the opportunity to recreate itself into a character-based program for boys and girls, young men and women.
  - b. No longer “Boy Scouts of America” but “Scouting”
  - c. Today's mission: “To prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime.”

- XXII. Will it work? Will Scouting continue to fill its mission?
- XXIII. It is up to the volunteers to make the changes work, and build a Scouting movement prepared and relevant for the next century.
- a. There is great hope and optimism for a vibrant Scouting movement for the future
- XXIV. As a Church we are walking a parallel path with the Boy Scouts
- XXV. As a Church, we are re-examining our policies and procedures, calling for a full investigation into the crisis, and cooperating with law enforcement.
- a. Our Bishops last week instituted a four step process directed at the accountability of Bishops
- XXVI. Our Archbishop William Lori invited us to participate in listening sessions, and now invites us to “virtual town halls” to “facilitate conversations and solicit input from the wider archdiocesan community.
- a. Two communication platforms
    - i. MyParish App and Flocknote – see (bulletin, email)
    - ii. <https://www.archbalt.org/archdiocese-of-baltimore-to-hold-virtual-town-hall-meetings-for-input-on-sexual-abuse-crisis/>
- XXVII. You are invited to ask the hard question, “Following the instruction of today’s Gospel, what, as a Church, do we need to cut off, or pluck out, to more fully image Christ and fulfill our calling? For example:
- a. How do we prevent this or other moral failings?
  - b. Should Church governance and teaching and sacramental authority be the same office and person?
  - c. Should governance include a balance of powers and oversight?
  - d. What should the qualifications be for Holy Orders, or for Administrative Governance?

- e. As we hear in the first reading, and the first half of the Gospel, God not constrained to work within the Church.
  - i. Where is God and the Holy Spirit at work in the world, and can we bring what's working into our Church?

XXVIII. This is our challenge, a rare opportunity in the History of the Church, and... your duty on the law of the Church, canon law.

- a. I urge you to take advantage of this moment, and with prayer and the Holy Spirit, Re-imagine the Church, **re-imagine** what we could be, and how best we may serve God's people for the next millennium.
- b. None of us here are called to be mere curators of an ancient museum,
- c. we are called to form a loving, living community of disciples, vibrant and relevant, teaching, doing, and preaching the Gospels to a hungry, fallen world.

**XXIX. In a fallen world and in a fallen Church, there can be no communion without sacrifice, without cutting and plucking.**

XXX. Let me end echoing advice from our Archbishop, William Lori:

- a. Continue to lift your eyes to Christ, the reason for our joy
- b. Be Bold, preach the Gospel, and have confidence in God who saves us
- c. Finally, the work of the Church must go on
  - i. Feed the hungry
  - ii. Give drink to the thirsty
  - iii. Clothe the naked
  - iv. Shelter the homeless
  - v. Visit the sick and imprisoned
  - vi. Bury the dead
  - vii. And..... we must add.....
  - viii. Heal the abused**

## ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

Updated September 21, 2018 |

**Archdiocese of Baltimore to hold virtual town-hall meetings for input** on sexual abuse crisis Archbishop William E. Lori spent the five weeks after the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report listening to clergy, seminarians, educators and laity with meetings, listening sessions and chatting with parishioners after Mass on at least eight occasions.

The grand jury report – on the heels of reports of abuse by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington who resigned from the rank of cardinal in July – again rocked the Catholic world with wide-ranging reports of sexual abuse of minors over the last seven decades.

“Many Catholics may be bewildered and angry at what’s going on in the church now,” Archbishop Lori said. “As this crisis has deepened, people are demanding action, and action now. You rightly ask what will be done, what will be different, and what is in place to prevent such terrible things from happening again.”

He said, “At every one of my more than 20 gatherings with parishioners, clergy, seminarians, Catholic Center employees, educators, parents, students and others, people have demanded transparency and accountability.

They want to play a more active role in the life of the Church, not only pastorally, but also administratively. Put simply, they don’t trust the bishops or Church leaders to address these issues on their own. I agree.”

The archbishop noted that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Administrative

Committee, of which he is a member, announced Sept. 19 new initiatives to promote accountability, including establishing a third-party system for people to report complaints of sexual abuse of minors by a bishop and sexual harassment of or sexual misconduct with adults by a bishop; instructing a USCCB committee to develop policies for addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or resigned because of allegations of sexual abuse of minors or sexual harassment of or misconduct with adults, including seminarians and priests; and supporting a full investigation into the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick.

Archbishop Lori said he regretted that he could not meet with every parishioner in the archdiocese, noting that three regional listening sessions were a way to engage with school personnel and leaders from as many parishes as possible as quickly as possible.

He encouraged pastors to hold local listening sessions and said that the archdiocese's auxiliary bishops could be available to attend some of those meetings.

“Because we were not able to invite everyone to the regional conversations we have already held, we are using two communications platforms – MyParish app and Flocknote – to facilitate conversations and solicit input from the wider archdiocesan community surrounding specific issues related to the abuse crisis,” the archbishop said.

“Conversation can't be just one-way. You have heard enough from me. I want to hear from you,” he said.

Flocknote is an email and text message tool created for use in Catholic ministries. MyParish App is a phone-based app which has event scheduling, Catholic prayers and other communication options for parishes. Both communications platforms are provided to all the parishes

in the archdiocese by the Archdiocese of Baltimore in coordination with the Catholic Review.

The virtual town halls will present information from Archbishop Lori and ask parishioners to reflect on the same questions that have been asked at regional listening sessions. Users will be able to respond to the questions in either platform and see the comments of others in the discussion.

The virtual town halls are scheduled to launch Sept. 23. Those signed up will receive notifications when the discussions are open for comment.

Parishioners who wish to ensure that they can participate in the discussion can sign up for Flocknote to receive email/text messages by texting TOWNHALL to 84576 (202-765-3441 for Spanish) or join via the web. Those who wish to participate via MyParish app can search for “My Parish” on the Apple iOS Store or Google Play. To join the discussion group, tap on the “Groups” button, search for the Archbishop Lori Town Hall group and join, or join via the web.