

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 8&9, 2018 – Special Reflection

As the award-winning film "Schindler's List" winds down, there is a scene where the almost amoral businessman, Oskar Schindler, is surrounded by the many, many Jewish men and women and children he saved from the ghettos and camps of Nazi Poland to work in his factory. As he sees all their faces, their grateful, living faces, the full impact of the Final Solution hits him. Schindler breaks down and weeps as he cries out over and over, "I could have saved more! I could have done more!!"

Even today, when people go on their European tours, when they visit Auschwitz in Poland, they often emerge from the preserved death-camp shaken, in tears, saying over and over again, "I never understood ... I never understood!!"

We've all heard the numbers: more than six million Jews killed at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War. We read those numbers in history books but we really can't fathom the cost until we see a story like Oskar Schindler's, until we visit one of the horrible places where these heinous crimes against humanity were carried out.

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, more and more has been learned, more has been brought to light about a dirty little secret that has been kept and hushed-up, denied and swept under the carpet, by pay-offs, threats, and intimidation. Children, teenagers, young

adults, grown men and women have been used to satisfy the lusts of powerful people for years and years, in places all over the world. This shameful secret has cut across all facets of society: from sports leagues to the business world; from schools and teachers to scouts and leaders; from politics and government to arts and entertainment. It lurks in outwardly respectable families and next-door neighbors; and as we have so sadly and shockingly learned, it has invaded the sanctuaries of our churches and besmirched the Roman collars of too many men people called "Father".

When any of these organizations learned of the problem in their midst, they worried about the cost: cost to the bottom line; cost to reputation; cost to trust and respect and the brand. But an organization is unfeeling and only seeks to protect itself, perpetuate itself; but they never really understood the cost.

I heard a report the other day on NPR that made me sit down and catch my breath. Each person that experiences abuse in their life, whether as a child or later when they're older, pays a price. Many pay with a loss of self-respect, with an inability to hold a good job, with bouts of depression and anxiety and thoughts of suicide. Many pay with dependency on drugs and alcohol to ease the pain of remembering and many have far more health issues than other people. Many pay with a loss of innocence and joy and faith, and many pay, in the end, with their lives. If we wanted to put a dollar amount on all this cost, it is estimated that each person who experiences abuse at the hands of power would cost, on average, three hundred thousand dollars in treatment, lost wages and opportunities. Multiply all the victims of all the abusers across all the fields of life by \$300,000 and the cost would be staggering! I never understood ... I never understood.

And yet, I can put faces on some of those numbers: a high school classmate touched inappropriately by one of our teachers at a sleepover we had at the teacher's house on the beach ... what must that have cost him?; a friend who was attacked as a child by a neighbor and when she was a little older by the janitor at her parochial school ... what must that have cost her in shame and fear?; a little girl touched on the desk of her parish pastor when she wasn't even seven years old yet ... what must that have cost her in a lifetime of anger and strained relationships?; a young teenage boy without a dad at home came to idolize his parish priest who was certainly no idol ... what must that have cost him in anorexia and substances to dull the pain of living with those memories. Sadly, I could go on but maybe you begin to see the cost.

The prophet Jeremiah lamented: "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, says the Lord."

Jesus said in St. Mark's gospel: "If any of you leads one of these little ones who believe in me astray, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea!"

A week ago, a friend asked me outside of church, "Whaddya think Jesus would do about this Church?" Then she said, "I think He'd blow it up and start over!!"

I think He would have fought for His flock and I think we, the sheep of His green pasture, the members of His Body, His Church, should not go like sheep meekly, mutely, to the slaughter. We must fight, demand that our Church ... OUR Church ... be the Church Christ intended; that

our leaders, that power listen to truth; that they count the cost not in scandal or dollars, but in lives and innocence and faith lost.

We, the Body of Christ, must make our Church a place where the little ones come to Jesus and are not hindered; where the poor and the sick and the lame and the blind, where the sinner and the outcast and the alien are welcomed; where the leaders are good shepherds who lay down their lives for the sheep; and where ALL of us are servants to the servants of God.

The dark night of secrets must end. We must stand with St. Francis of Assisi whom Jesus called: "Rebuild my Church!"; shine the light of goodness, honesty, integrity in all the dark corners; that the Church, OUR Church, Christ's Church, might at last be that shining beacon on the hill, that Paradise that Jesus Christ called all of us to on Calvary: "This day you shall be with me in Paradise!"

No, Jesus would not destroy His Church. He would fight for her goodness: "Do you think I have come for peace? I have come to light a fire ... how I wish the blaze were ignited!"

Our faith must be the fire that burns away the weeds, the thorns, the sins of the fathers, so that the Kingdom of God might take root and grow in our midst; a Kingdom, a Church where no one would ever again pay the cost of innocence taken, trust betrayed, a life ruined.

With God's help and our vigilance, we can see that it is so. We can. We must.