

Remarks by Msgr. Michael Matz regarding the PA State-Wide Grand Jury Report delivered at the 10:30 am mass on Sunday August 19, 2018. Click [here](#) for livestream replay.

I usually begin with a joke and then tell a story, but I think the circumstances that have occurred this week call us to begin tonight (today) a little differently. I actually found what St. Paul had to say very appropriate as an introduction: “Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue. In ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord”....try to understand what is the will of the Lord. And we might be wondering about that very thing and asking: Lord, what are you up to?

I think everyone in this church knows what it is I am referring to—the release of the State-Wide Grand Jury Report this past Wednesday.

When I saw the papers on Thursday morning, the image that came to my mind was that of the victims and of a wound that doesn't heal—one that stays open and raw. This is not the first time we have been through something like this, and although this current report doesn't specifically include Philadelphia, we are all too painfully aware of our own reports from 2005 and 2011. So I understand that there would be renewed, and perhaps more intense, anger and deep sadness and even a sense of betrayal. And this is not the time to offer a defense of any sort—and frankly, I don't think there is a defense anyway.

So, I think our question is this: Lord, what are you trying to tell us through the unfolding of these events? What *is* your will?

It seems that at some level the Lord is purifying the church and church leadership, and obviously this purification is not yet over. Purification can be painful, and certainly what the church has experienced (and continues to experience) *is* painful—for all of us, and for you, the lay people. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for you

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out in the community, in your workplaces, and especially when you are with people who are not Catholic, or with those who have already left the church. What must they be saying to you these days?

I think in handling these cases in the past, the church saw as its main concern preserving the institution first and foremost, and the care of victims did not have a primary place. I believe God is asking church leaders to see themselves in a different light—to repent, and to begin to carry out their role as shepherds differently. Maybe we are being stripped of things so that we can learn to focus on Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and not the preservation of structures.

The only way we can begin to see ourselves through this is to cling to Christ and his message. Maybe the humbling experience of what we are going through can help the church put priorities in right order and refocus our vision more clearly on the Gospel.

The church began with a small group of poor and humble individuals who just wanted to follow Christ and share His Word. Perhaps the Lord is calling us back to this humble beginning. It is this foundation that we cling to as we allow the Lord to transform us.

I ask each of you, the faithful of our parish: do not abandon your church—Saint John Neumann Parish. This parish *is church for us*. You may think to yourself, why should I listen to these people, they certainly don't practice what they preach. Yet, it is only through your faithfulness during this storm (just as we experience storms in our own personal lives) that we can be renewed as God's people.

We pray for healing for all victims, and for all those touched by this crisis. I ask you to pray for me and for my brother priests, that we may continue to preach the

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Gospel of Christ to others. We need you more than ever before—we need your support more than ever!

So, let us appeal to our better angels to heal our church and truly live out Christ's call to humility and love. *You* are the church, *we* are the church. We priests are here to be of service to you. As I said to you on the day of my installation, this is your parish, this is our parish. In faith, we have trust in God, hopeful and confident that we will get through this together.

Let me offer you an image that might be helpful to you. It is one that has been helpful to me on many occasions. It comes from Mark's Gospel, Chapter Four. The apostles are in the boat with Jesus. A great storm comes up and the Apostles are terrified. And Jesus is asleep at the back of the boat. The Apostles can't believe that Jesus remains asleep as the storm rages. And they say to him, (my paraphrase) "Hello, don't you see what's going on here? Aren't you going to do something?" Jesus gets up, tells to wind and the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And there is great calm. But then he says to the apostles, "Why are you afraid? Where is your faith? Didn't you trust me?"

We are in the boat *together*. God has the rudder and we each have an oar. God decides where we are going, and we are learning to leave the destination in his hands. He knows what he's doing, and we are confident that He will bring us to the other side of the storm.

I don't have the answers, so I'm not standing here today trying to give you answers. But I do have confidence that together we can get through this storm.

Remember, God has the rudder, and we, in faith, have an oar.