

The 2nd Sunday of Lent — March 17, 2019

Ralph Waldo Emerson says that each of us has a greater possibility. “There is in each of us a chamber, or a closet, that has never been opened. If we are to realize this ‘great possibility,’ we need to be challenged to go beyond ourselves, beyond what we think we are capable of and have settled for. We need someone to say to us, “Launch out into the deep.” I certainly hope you are discovering that reality in your Small Group studies. I find the material to be very challenging, and certainly it holds that perspective of Emerson to find that chamber, that closet, we have never even noticed before or looked in. That most assuredly is hard work. Naturally, there are significant issues of fear, and struggle, and even paranoia, that come to the fore as individuals make this discovery Wow ! There are things in my life that I never knew, never even dreamed of, that I am now coming to learn about myself, and indeed about my relationships with others and I never saw it before!

Consequently, this work of confronting the sins I have tolerated in my life is awfully hard work. I have first-hand, experienced some extraordinary work among people in some of these Groups, and others — without breaking any confidentiality, reporting that their Groups are truly engaging the material. I commend you for your courage, and your commitment, as you journey through this material. It certainly is launching out into the deep, or as The Master put it: ‘putting out into deep waters.’ I am also aware that others get bogged down in orthodoxy, and correctness of the material, and whether this author is right or wrong in what he is saying. Let me assure you that is not a very important issue the big, very large, over-arching question is: “What is the Lord in the power of His Holy Spirit, attempting to teach us through this experience?”

The Gospel today is a powerful invitation to look more deeply at this reality. The Transfiguration, is an invitation to look beyond. Look beyond what you see Look Beyond what you hear Look Beyond what is told to you! For us as Catholics it is fleshed out in the beautiful hymn :

“Look Beyond, the Bread you eat, see your Savior and your Lord.
Look Beyond the cup you drink, see His Love, poured out as Blood.”

Peter, James, and John, certainly got to Look Beyond! And their reaction, or at least Peter's, was not astounding. "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents. But, he did not know what he was saying."

I am pretty sure you have all had occasions in life, where you have wanted to just stop the merry-go-round and say let's stay right here I can live in this and manage to deal with life precisely from here, and not have to deal with the stuff of everyday life. Certainly, an understandable perspective! Jesus' take on the matter was quite different. In short, His message was :
'Mountaintop Experiences are Given for Valley Duty'

In other words, we receive manifestations of the Good Lord, in and throughout our lives. And they are provided to us to encourage our failing spirits, and to Look Beyond.

I would like to use that perspective to address the bishop's letter which I read at the beginning of Mass. I have major concerns regarding this approach of releasing the names of all who have a credible allegation against them. Most of whom are already dead!!!

I am not sure of the motivation behind such action, and while it is said to be done for a spirit of transparency, I am not against transparency in any way! However, when it involves maligning others to accomplish such transparency, I am certainly concerned. We reflected only a week ago on the idea of Gossip, or Slanderous Talk about others — one of the bedrocks of that teaching is that it matters not whether the information is true or false a much larger question is: Are we being slanderous in our talk, and what greater good is being sought in our action? This action we are taking?

I don't know the names of those being released, and I am sure there will be some great sense of shock and horror to all of us who have known some of these priests, or just known of them by name. I am not sure what greater good will be brought about by this revelation of names, and if it victimizes those who have already been through the horrible experience of being abused and have tried to work their way through such destructive behavior. I pray that this righteous move does not victimize them further.

I do know, without question, the terribly sad consequences of the abuse that has been inflicted on very innocent people, and that we have as a Church done a seriously bad job of dealing with all of the issues. In fact, I would go so far as to say, had we shown greater integrity and greater

compassion as a Church at the beginning stages of all of these revelations, we would not be in this situation right now.

I know that the list of names, some 37 or more, that will be released makes no distinction between a pedophile and an individual who has had one lone allegation leveled against him. I am speaking of a priest who many years ago, as a newly ordained priest, had an inappropriate relationship with a 15 or 16 year old young lady, there was inappropriate engagement and touching without sexual intercourse, and the case was brought to light just a few years ago. I understand because of the laws it was lawfully wrong, and punishable, I am not questioning that. However, there was never another question about this man's service in more than 50 years of his service. I am not adjudicating the issues of law, or anything else, but I am making clear that as you become aware of this list, things may not be as clear as they appear to be. Look Beyond.

As we journey through this whole devastating and sad experience, I encourage you to bring it to the Lord in your prayer.

I believe we will not journey through this very sad chapter by just creating Victims and Perpetrators Our prayer is intensely necessary for both Victims and Perpetrators, alike. Let me tell you a story to try and help give meaning to this —

The year after I was ordained, I was in Northern Ireland visiting my three classmates who were stationed there, there were 2 others with me. The troubles were raging on, and when a British Army tanker rolled up the street, I watched the young kids pick up stones off the street to throw at the tank. I said to my classmate, Larry, the terribly sad thing about this is 'that we are just losing another generation'... I understand the reasons for the hate and the despise, but who is going to save us? If I were the kid, I would be doing the very same thing.

The terrible images many of them had seen in their own homes as the soldiers came at night and pulled their fathers out of bed, and out of their homes as children, tried endlessly to hold onto them. But somewhere we are going to have to change ... and follow the Masterend the Violence and Hate.

A few years after that episode on a Sunday morning, Jeanne, a Belfast lady was driving with her husband and children to Mass when her husband was shot. A horrible tragedy. Soon afterwards, Jeanne said she was praying with the children, when her young son, Gavin, asked, “Mummy, will the men who killed Daddy go to heaven?”

Breathing a silent prayer she said, “If they are really sorry, and ask Jesus to forgive them, then they will go to heaven.” On hearing this Gavin said, “Well, if they are going to be there, I don't want to be in heaven with them.” Jeanne thought about this for a little while, and then she said, “If Jesus forgives and saves them, setting them free from their terrible sin, He will change them. They will be completely different people.”

Gavin paused then said, “Mummy, let's pray for these men, and ask Jesus to save them.”

Jesus challenges us to respond to darkness with light. To respond to what is worst in the other, with what is best in us. The most important issue of our day is: How to resist evil, without doing further evil in the process. Many of us think we have done our Christian duty if we refrain from doing harm to our enemy. But, Jesus asks a whole lot more of us.

—Fr. Gerry Hurley