

Nov. 30, 2018

To all my dear brothers and sisters in Wichita Falls:

May the Lord's blessings be yours as we approach the holy season of Advent, in preparation of our hearts for the celebration of our Savior's birth. I hope you know how very fond of you I am.

I would like to start with a story from my previous assignment, at Holy Family Parish in Vernon. It took place on a Saturday evening, before the 5pm Mass, and was just before I was assigned to Sacred Heart Parish. José, a parishioner who, along with his wife, was active in the parish and community and whose friendship I had enjoyed as a guest in their home, was outside the door with a clipboard. I asked him what he was doing. He told me that he was going to "fix this thing" and get the Bishop to leave me in Vernon. He said something to the effect that "that clown in Fort Worth needs to be made to change his mind". I was shocked and told him that the "clown" he referred to (Bishop Vann) was his shepherd, my spiritual father, and our connection to the universal Church in apostolic succession. I found myself getting angry and struggled to remain calm. But I told José that no one had permission to solicit signatures for any purpose, distribute material of any kind, or sell anything on parish property without the pastor's permission, a permission which he did not request and would not receive. He blustered that "this wasn't right" and that he was doing it for me. But, in fact, he was not doing it for me but for himself, and I pointed out to him that it was that same bishop who had sent me to Holy Family in the first place, but now had other needs in the Diocese that he needed me to serve, as was his responsibility in the Holy Spirit. I will return to this incident in a moment.

I (along with the priests around me) was very distressed when I heard that Father Jeff had left Sacred Heart abruptly, without plans for the pastoral care of the flock he was sent to care for. I thought of the question from Scripture, "How can a mother abandon her child?" The question presumes that it is not possible for a loving mother to do so. I do not judge Father Jeff, but like you, my brother priests and I are deeply hurt by what he did, and I must make judgments about actions and their consequences. At ordination I, and every priest, make a solemn vow of obedience to the bishop who ordains me, and to his successors, *and* we do so before God and everyone in the cathedral. A most solemn promise.

Now, I am horrified and shocked to hear that a few of you are taking to social media against our bishop, against me, against my brother priests, and against the rest of the Catholic Church of Fort Worth. I also hear that there is some kind of meeting to promote this separatist movement to take place in downtown Wichita Falls.

Now I return to the story at the beginning of this letter.

After I had to stop José in what was actually a very harmful and scandalous action, he became angry, left the parish, and eventually moved away, never attending Mass there again. But in retrospect, I failed him in one very important regard. One of a priest's very important moral responsibilities is to help the faithful identify sinful behavior, repent, and correct it (Matt 18:15-17). I did not point out to José that what he was doing evil, and gravely harmful to the Body of Christ. I allowed him to live in mortal sin without correction. I will have to answer to God for that. I do not want to be guilty of that in this matter, or ever again.

So to all who of you who may be a part of this disturbing movement, if you still have any affection for me, if your intention is to be a faithful Catholic, if you would not want to separate yourselves from God's grace, if you do not want to seriously endanger your immortal soul, I beg you, see to it that these outsiders (as I believe they must be) arrive to an unwelcoming and empty room. For the love of Christ, stop this dangerous action which does such scandalous harm to Mother Church!

And this is very important. Please, do not commit the mortal sin that is being promoted. It is truly mortal! If you did not realize this before, now you have been informed.

Rather, if you would be a faithful Catholic, then do the following:

Pray for your Bishop.

Pray for your priests, especially Father Jeff.

Pray for your parish, united under our bishop in the Spirit.

Pray and work for healing and reconciliation.

And know that I continue to pray for you every day.

Today, I offer my rosary and Mass intention for the beloved parish of Sacred Heart in Wichita Falls, the vast majority of which I have no doubt remains faithful and true, and today I will fast in penance for the grievous wound being inflicted on her by those seeking their own selfish agenda.

In Christ's love,

Reverend Jack McKone

A priest of the One, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of the Diocese of Fort Worth