

Off the Top of My Head...

In June, news outlets reported that Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, retired Archbishop of Washington, D.C., had been removed from public ministry by the Vatican and resigned from the College of Cardinals. The reason? Credible allegations of sexual abuse during his time as a priest and bishop. I won't go into detail; there are many reliable online sources with this information.

These reports were not "front page news." Is this kind of news is now less remarkable or shocking than it was in the past? While people may not *expect* clergy to be abusers of minors, they seem to be less surprised at such revelations than in the past. Are we all becoming numb to this?

My instinctive emotion to this news (once I heard it – in July) was frustration and anger. On deeper reflection there is a deep sadness. The victims of abuse usually carry significant emotional and spiritual scars for the rest of their lives. It's unacceptable to compare one person's trauma with another's, but when abuse is inflicted by a church worker or member of the clergy, there is a whole new layer of pain, accompanied by a whole new layer of sadness.

Even though the percentage of abusers is very small and the Church has made significant strides in combatting this problem, it's probably safe (and sad) to say that in any parish the size of Our Lady of Grace, there are several victims (or parents of victims) of abuse carried out by clergy or other church workers. As we gather for the Eucharist every weekend, we should be aware of their presence, even *and especially* if we don't know who they are. Or we should be aware of their absence, perhaps the result of shame, fear, anger, or despair.

My initial, instinctive response (frustration and anger) comes from another result of this evil: The Church loses its voice (the voice for peace, justice, and moral values, the voice against evil, the voice proclaiming Gospel joy) if it or its leaders are not trusted.

Anger, sadness, and hope can all coexist, and, today, they must. In our anger and sadness, we must pray for God's solution – through the human beings who form the Church. And while we pray in hope, may our sadness grow to compassion, and our anger motivate us to expect and to demand transparency, justice, and transformation, which the Church must have at this moment.

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