

This has been a very sad week.

- First, for the survivors of sexual abuse.
- Second, for Catholics across the Commonwealth.
- Third, for the wider public.

The latest Grand Jury report is a bitterly painful text. There are many emotions that many are feeling: shock, horror, hurt, sorrow, embarrassment, disappointment, and even outrage.

The Grand Jury report released this past Tuesday has shaken us. We are saddened because precious children have been wounded by those who should have known better.

Father Coyle and I share these emotions with you. For me these days have been filled with my own shock, horror, sadness, bewilderment, tears and deep prayer. Priests are experiencing the same emotions as everyone else.

This is hard for all of us - each in our own way. But, this is hardest of all for survivors of abuse. All victims of abuse deserve to know healing, dignity, and peace.

Our constant prayer must be for the survivors and their families that they find their individual path and that the Holy Spirit heals their wounds and gives them peace.

They have our prayers, support and commitment to ensure that such things never happen again.

I truly believe that, first and foremost, as your pastor, I need to say that the sins and crimes that have come to light and the failings of Church leaders in allowing this to happen were grievously wrong. It never should have happened.

Children and families deserved much better. You, and all the members of the Church everywhere, deserved much better.

I am so, so very sorry for the pain that all of this has caused and continues to cause.

The apology of Bishop Gainer, and the bishops around the state, recognized and acknowledged the grievous mistakes of the past. And that is an important signal to all of us, and an important step in what will be a long road and process.

People are angry. I am angry. Maybe you are angry too.

Properly placed, anger can be just. Anger that is justified is not only understandable, it is righteous. An anger guided by clear thinking, prudence, and a desire for real justice.

Jesus showed anger toward the Temple moneychangers, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees.

An anger that is well placed can bear good fruit.

This hurts—most of all for the survivors. It hurts us as individuals, as a parish family and a community. It has broken hearts. But there is a way forward.

It starts with the extensive child protection measures that have been in place since 2002 to ensure our children's safety. But ultimately it begins with Jesus, Himself.

In the gospel today (John 6:51-56), Jesus is honest with people about Who He is. He identifies Himself as the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. That the bread that He gives is His flesh for the life of the world.

We need food for nourishment. To survive. More than ever, we need to Jesus. To hold on tight to Him. To allow His Body and Blood to help us, to heal us, and to give us the comfort that only He can give.

Just as Jesus is honest about Who He is, we need to be honest as a Church and with ourselves.

Certainly honest in doing the right things – to always walk in the light. To always act with responsibility and justice.

But also to be honest with ourselves.

This is a difficult time filled with a range of emotions. We need to feel them. Be honest about them. And work through them.

When family is in crisis, the family pulls together. I hope you will come together with me, as my parish family, as we work our way through this. To be there for each other with support, listening, love, and prayer.

I have asked myself (and God) over and over this week what I should be doing to make this better.

The only real answer I can come up with is to continue serving you, the People of God, as best I can. You are the Church – you are the reason I was ordained. And I hope that using my gifts and talents, even with my shortcomings and limitations, will help whoever comes my way.

As we move forward, I hope, in small some way, to be an instrument God's love to help our parish, and you - our Church, to heal.

As I offer you this pledge of my life as a priest, I know I speak for Father Coyle. We love you and will continue to serve you as best we can.

In addition, I want you to know we work hard every day to make sure all of our children and young people, whether in our school, our PREP program, our CYO teams, or any other parish group or activity, are safe and protected in every way. Our policies and procedures include background checks and mandatory reporting.

Our safe environment training teaches the warning signs of abuse and what constitutes a healthy relationship. Our safe environment coordinator makes sure that the adults and clergy who are interacting with your children are background checked and trained.

I make that pledge to you solemnly, before God, and I commit myself to ensuring that safety and protection are achieved in every and any possible way.

In the Responsorial Psalm today, we heard these words:

*When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,
and from all his distress He saved him.*

Psalm 34:7

And so Mass continues today and we make our way through the days ahead, let us call out to the Lord in prayer: for victims and survivors, for their families, for the Church, and for each other.

Very Reverend Neil S. Sullivan, VF
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