

The Pope is Wrong

(Apparently. Gasp!)

I cringed when I read about Pope Francis' remarks at the end of his trip to Chile wherein he, seemingly, put the burden of proof on survivors of clergy sexual abuse with respect to a bishop who had been accused of gross negligence (or worse) in dealing with the abuser-priest.

According to the translation given in the news report, Francis responded to a reporter's question as to why this bishop had been give responsibility of a major diocese in Chile when, in his former assignment, he had botched the handling of abuse cases so badly. Pope Francis' is quoted as having responded by saying that he had not received "*a shred of evidence,*" and that, without the evidence, it is "slander" against this bishop.

Our Metropolitan Archbishop, Cardinal O'Malley publicly responded to the Pope's remarks with a sense of grave concern: "*It is understandable that Pope Francis' statements yesterday in Santiago, Chile were a source of great pain for survivors of sexual abuse by clergy or any other perpetrator. Words that convey the message "if you cannot prove your claims then you will not be believed" abandon those who have suffered reprehensible criminal violations of their human dignity and relegate survivors to discredited exile."*

He went on to express confidence that the Pope is committed to working for justice and healing for all victims of abuse despite these unfortunate remarks.

Along with many people in the Church, I am greatly dismayed by what Pope Francis said, and I am hoping it is not what it appears. But I think that this is an opportunity to consider the Pope from a different point of view: He is a fallible, sinful, human being like his predecessor, Peter, and all the rest of us.

Papal Infallibility is often misunderstood as "*the Pope can do no wrong.*" The doctrine of Papal Infallibility concerns only formal pronouncements on doctrine and morals which are made "*ex cathedra,*" which translates "*from the chair:*" This Latin phrase signifies that the pronouncement is made with solemnity, and in communion with all the bishops of the world. The infallibility of the

Pope is very "circumscribed:" It is not to be confused with "impeccability."

The Pope can and does sin, and he goes to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to confess and to do penance. Apparently, he was very wrong in what he said in response to the reporter in Chile. I say "apparently" because I don't know enough of the specifics in the matter at hand, but the response of Cardinal O'Malley signals that such is the case.

Let us not be naïve that, even before the horrors of the clergy abuse scandal became public, the Church had her enemies in the world. Agreed? If ever there were a scandal tailor-made to discredit "the Church" and everything it stands for, the sexual abuse of children by priests must certainly be it. [I put the Church in quotations because, properly speaking, the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church and the Spirit is Truth. It is the human members who sin.] With this "tailor-made" scandal in hand, the enemies of the Church have all that they need to bring her to her "knees" . . . to bankrupt her, discredit her, humiliate her, and, if possible, annihilate her. But, is this justice? Will this heal the wounds caused by these predators? Is it justice for believers who understand the Church as Christ's work for our salvation?



This is part of the dynamic involved in contending with this horrific issue in the life of the Church today, and leaders----most especially the Pope--- need to have laser-like-focus on the abuse victims and their healing and justice-demands, [including the removal of guilty bishops from office, etc.] It seems that the Pope may have yielded to the temptation to lash out at individuals like those described in the previous paragraph; those who are leveraging this criminal tragedy for their own purposes. It was a mistake, (a sin?), probably borne of the weariness of an 81-year-old world traveler who is----like the rest of us---imperfect. Let us keep it all in perspective: It is the Lord's Church and we are all "jars of clay."