

Why can't we get our act straight?

If it is frustrating to lay men and women that those who govern the Church can't seem to hold priests and bishops accountable when they have done wrong, it is all-the-more so for other priests and bishops. Why are certain bishops of the Church sacrificing our collective credibility so that a guilty man may save face?

There have been murmurings for years about Cardinal McCarrick's misconduct which, even, I had heard from other priests. Rumors are rumors but, often, where there is smoke, there is fire. I am not a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, nor have I ever been a member of a diocese overseen by Cardinal McCarrick, so why am I hearing such things? If they have traveled far and wide in Church circles, from where do they emanate and why didn't the people who knew the truth behind the rumors do anything about it?

This is maddening beyond my ability to express it! The priesthood of the Bishops, Priests and Deacons is a shared reality. Its sort of like "human nature;" it's one thing that we all share. When members distort or pervert the reality, we all get smeared and sullied.

This defilement of the priesthood has been disclosed in the public forum since the time of my ordination, and it hasn't stopped! Just when you think we can move forward with the positive work of the mission, some new disclosure comes out, and we all get smeared again.

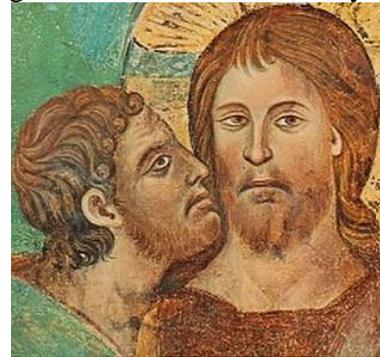
In my other job I have to deal with clergy misbehavior issues of every sort, and I have some insight into the difficulty of these matters:

When the truth is bad enough, there are those who are more than willing to cultivate conspiracy theories and rumors which make it out to be much worse than it is. This is, of course, a result of the loss of trust in the institution's ability to police itself. But, even when we want to be forthright with the public, we are facing the prospect of misdemeanors being turned into high-crimes. Some people simply prefer the rumors to the truth.

Internally, the Bishops suffer the same problem we see in doctors and in the police, (consider the State Police overtime scandal which is unfolding now):

There seems to be a tendency not to want to see the "smoke", lest they have to deal with the "fire." This is the sort of "willed ignorance" which was lampooned on the old 1960's television series "Hogan's Heroes" wherein the bumbling Sargent Schultz would nervously insist "***I know nothing! No---thing!***", when, of course, he damn-well knew something or everything.

We should have learned by now that "Denial is not a River in Egypt:" We don't really spare people from being scandalized by avoiding the truth or covering things up or by mischaracterizing them. All we end up doing is losing the trust of people and exacerbating the scandal and the outcry.



Other considerations:

To say that Bishops and Priests are "only human" is a terrible excuse for crimes and ethics violations. But, in fact, Bishops and Priests are human beings, each with his own back-story, character defects and wounds. A regrettable fact of history is that there was a time when they were all put on a pedestal and treated as something above the ordinary human. This sort of mythology, along with the abuse of power by some of those men, has come back to bite us in a big way. The stew of resentments from that historical period are a strong component of the animus toward the Church in our day.

If we are to mature as individual Catholics and as a Church, we must certainly deal with these matters forthrightly and honestly. But we also need to put them in the perspective of faith: The Lord did appoint flesh and blood men to "*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*" but he got a "Judas" in the process, and Peter did not perform so well either. Our faith is in the Word and in the Sacramental Grace that is delivered by the "earthen vessel" priest. Despite his sin or defects, that grace is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.