

HOMILY BY DEACON STEPHEN ESCALERA

CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH

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When I was in the order we would meet on a regular basis with our superior. This was for the purpose of helping the order know how the brothers were doing. This was especially true for student friars. We met with our formators more often.

In my first or postulant year my superior was an older Italian brother named, Peter. Near the end of the year we started preparing to take the next step in the formation process and become novices.

I and my fellow novices were in one of our frequent meetings when Brother Peter wisely asked us what we planned to do if for some reason we did not move on to the next step.

Now, at this point, let me take a step back for a moment. As part of our training, we were taught how to use the daily prayer book called the divine office. Five times a day we read from scripture and prayed. This was, of course, in addition to the scripture we read as part of our regular instruction. After a while, Bible verses tend to sink into your subconscious. I can't, like some of our Protestant brothers and sisters, tell you chapter and verse, but I am familiar with many Biblical quotes, even if it is not at a conscious level.

So, when Brother Peter asked his question, I quite innocently and quite subconsciously paraphrased today's Gospel passage. I said, "where would I go, what would I do?"

Not realizing what I had done, I was somewhat taken aback by Brother Peter's bemused smile. After all, I had spoken plainly and honestly. I really did have no idea what I would do. I certainly could not have foreseen that I would eventually leave the order or that I would marry and have a family. But that is also part of the Gospel reading. Jesus has the Word of eternal life. I was faithful to the will of God when I entered the order and I was faithful when I left. I trusted and God did, indeed, give life.

And here I am now, a deacon and preaching no less. Trust, even when you have no idea where it is all going. Of course there is more to the reading. Sometimes the message is hard to hear. Sometimes we do feel like leaving.

I am sure you have heard of the horrific news coming from Pennsylvania. The pain and suffering of the abuse itself is too much to contemplate, let alone realize that it went on for so long. But there is more. They knew! At least some of our leaders and shepherds knew and covered it up. I suppose I can understand the desire to minimize scandal. But in so doing, countless others were put in harm's way and suffered. The deception and secrecy is itself scandal. And where else? Where else has this happened? New York, San Francisco,.....Pueblo?

How can this be? Surely this is not the will of God. This is not life. Of course it is not, but how could God allow this to happen in His holy church? In truth, I don't know. I don't understand. I could not have predicted that we would ever come to such a place. I have no idea where this is going.

But, I have been here before. I do know that God is still here and that He is still speaking the word of life. I have seen it. As in today's gospel, we have a choice. This message is hard. God's church is plagued by sin and evil. I can only say that if you know your church history, you know that it has always been this way. God is asking us if we are willing to stay and help do something about it. God does speak the words of eternal life. He is asking us to hear that word and bring healing and hope to those who have suffered so much. But we can't do that if we leave. What part does God want us to play? What answer will we have for God if we do leave?

We all have our stories of hurt at the hands of some church official. And that includes me. However, I am still here. I may not have suffered the most horrific of abuses, but I have personally encountered those who have. I am no St. Peter, yet God's healing and grace can still flow through me or anyone of us if we choose to stay, if we say yes no matter how dark the situation.

Indeed, the greater the darkness, the greater the need for light. The church did not get here through the actions of one individual. It won't reform and move on through the actions of one individual either. We need each other. God needs you. Do you wish to leave or do you believe? If you believe, if you choose to stay, I assure you, you will not be alone.