

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

GUILTY...UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT!

About two Sundays ago. I met a parishioner outside of Mass who was visibly upset. When I asked her what was wrong, she said, "Oh, Father, it's terrible about Monsignor Ansaldi isn't it? He was such a good man!" Having known Monsignor, I had to agree with her. He was definitely a wonderful man who was well loved here at Saint Charles and at Saint Joseph by the Sea High School where he served for many years as principal.

Now for those of you who didn't hear or read about it in the newspapers, Monsignor Ansaldi's name, along with Monsignor Thomas Gaffney, our former pastor, appeared on a list of priests accused of sexual abuse. To be clear, both of these priests, long associated with Saint Charles Church, had accusations against them that could not be actually proven. However, the board conducting the investigations stated that those making these charges would be eligible to receive some form of compensation.

The point is that those priests are merely accused of sexual misconduct may not be perpetrators! That is very important to remember. In these cases there is no "real evidence" to substantiate the charges but somebody's words. As has been said, "What can asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence." I'm not a lawyer, but I think that what has been done to Monsignor Ansaldi and Monsignor Gaffney and others is immoral and unfair.

That is not to say that there have not been shameful actions committed by some of the clergy through the years. For those who have preyed on young people and violated them, there are serious words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel: "Whoever scandalizes one of these little ones who believes in me-it were better for him that a big millstone were hanged about his neck and that he be drowned in the sea." (Saint Matthew 18). Yes, there are some priests who have "gone bad." But we cannot tarnish everyone with the same brush.

Of course there are people in our mixed up world who can "smell money" and smell it a thousand miles away. In this regard, some lawyers have made it easier for people to come forward with unsubstantiated allegations against clergy by advertising on radio and TV this way: "Have you ever been abused by a Catholic priest?" No wonder a very fine priest once said to me, "Louie, all of us are just one phone call away from disaster!"

About ten years ago, when I was pastor at Sacred heart, a priest from a neighboring parish came to see me. The priest was heartbroken. He told me the source of his anguish. A young man had accused him of groping him in the hallway during CCD (Religious Classes).

The priest had a stellar record and categorically denied the charges. Again, there were no witnesses. But because of the serious nature of the charge, the priest had to step down from the parish and live with his sister until he was declared "Not Guilty" by the Vatican. I urged the priest to fight the charge and thank God, he was vindicated. However, the priest's name and reputation were "besmirched." How can you repair that kind of damage to your reputation in the long run? It seems that for clergy you are "Guilty until proven innocent!"

A case in point is the recent disgraceful article in the Staten Island Advance by Maura Grundlund urging that several accused priest's names, including Monsignor Ansaldi's, be removed from buildings in their honor. Before we "rush to judgement" and condemn others, let us have all the facts and let us be fair!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*