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Mahony's Scripture passages evoke sympathy for children, not clergy

by Isabella R. Moyer

NCR Today

This Lent, Cardinal Roger Mahony is looking to Scripture for comfort in this present moment of humiliation for him, other clergy and the church. Joshua J. McElwee has been summarizing some of these reflections for us. The cardinal's scriptural mediations have focused on the suffering servant of Isaiah and Mary at the foot of the cross.

These two Good Friday readings force us to enter into the horror of innocence and purity brutally and violently torn apart and hung up for all to see. Isaiah's raw descriptions conjure images too awful to perceive, so vile that we struggle to look the victim in the eye. The words tear at your heart and soul.

The image of Mary at the foot of the cross is another deep image of the passion story. In the midst of the most horrendous injustice, she stands. At the foot of her son who was tortured, humiliated and hung up like a common criminal, she stands. Where other disciples cowered and ran away, she stands, incarnating faith, hope and love in the midst of darkness and unknowing.

Cardinal Mahony writes: "This scandal is putting us, the clergy and the church, where we belong -- with the excluded ones; Jesus was painted with the same brush as the two thieves crucified with him."

It is not the clergy and church I ponder in these images. I see the suffering servant in the children and young people who endured the horrors of abuse at the hands of those they were taught to trust. It is their mouths that were silenced. It is they who had to endure the injustice of not being believed. It is they who had to endure the humiliation of seeking help only to be told nothing could be done. It is they who had to endure the fear and anger as their molesters continued in their ministries, free to abuse others.

Yes, it is a time of humiliation for our church. As more and more information pours out, it is becoming a time of personal humiliation for many who hid behind clerical smoke-screens for too long. For those of us in the pews who had no idea of the perversion that was happening, it is a time of absolute disgust and horror as we struggle to make sense of an evil so dark in the church we love.

When I hear these readings read on Good Friday, I won't be thinking of humiliated bishops and priests. My thoughts will be with all the truly innocent souls who have already shared in Christ's passion here on earth. With Mary, we stand by them and with them. With her, we pray that in the midst of darkness and unknowing, our loving God will ensure that justice will reign.

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