

I thought there was a fire under the oak tree next door yesterday morning.

It turned out, it was the sun.

*First light*, again, on schedule, from millions of miles away.

It just comes. It's delightful.

But at first, it was alarming.

There has been a lot of "first light" over the last two weeks.

And it has been alarming.

Our neighbors in PA have an AG who was "all in."

It was a "Spotlight" effort directed by the senior lawyer of the state.

Most of what he uncovered was "old."

What was new?

Perhaps the most disheartening news was the fact that there is a *renewed* effort on the part of some to keep *as much of the mess as possible* hidden, beyond reach, *in the dark*.

Money is pouring in to fight state legislation that wants to lift the statute of limitations for two years. Big money, Catholic money, dark money.

To my thinking, *that is as bad as it gets*.

Last weekend, some Catholic preachers tried to find words

that would encourage the faithful who came, to keep coming.

Others used those precious moments to beg forgiveness for unthinkable crimes.

Still others suggested that protecting predators was tantamount to condoning their heinous behaviors.

And they believe we have reached the point when we must cry: "Enough."

"Enough" is the appropriate response when the truth is repugnant, evil, and had been shielded under a veil of trust. Sacred trust.

It cannot be the same anymore.

*"What happened when a dad challenged a priest at Mass about the sex abuse crisis?"*

That was the title of yet another article in America Magazine, a Jesuit publication.

Father Mark Horak sj apologized to those feeling angry and let down by church leaders, and he lamented that lay people were not empowered to do more in the Church.

In some ways, he offered a *call to action*. He called for change.

But as Father Horak finished preaching in Decatur GA last weekend, a young father stood up from his pew near the front of his church.

With emotion in his voice, he asked the priest: "How? Tell us how."

I went to school with Mark Horak. I have corresponded with him in the last few years.

"Withhold offerings, write letters," he said. He went on for ten more minutes.

"But in the end," he lamented, "there is no way for us to have much influence.

Not you. Not me."

If the funds dried up, or if nobody came to church anymore, that would be a death nell.  
But I pray for something more immediately effective.

Something long overdue.

I want the Spirit to act more explosively.

Somebody within the system needs to muster the courage to act, speak up, challenge.

But it has been my observation for some time now that peers don't challenge peers.

We grump about those we have to answer to,

And we are, at times, exasperated by those who answer to us.

But we seldom challenge *colleagues* (peers) who make mistakes, or judge poorly.

Perhaps because we have done the same thing. We aren't perfect. Nobody is.

Bishops, I suspect, do not challenge one another either.

*That has to change.*

The Bishops did not follow their own counsel.

Their 2002 document, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*,  
went unheeded.

The way some PA bishops replied to the Attorney General report,  
you would think bishops are the last ones to want to turn the lights on,  
due to either personal or corporate guilt, untold liability.

But we are all connected . . .

To refuse to challenge a peer is, therefore, a refusal to challenge yourself.

***The bishops have to want to see.***

***The light has to shine inside, too. First light . . . within.***

***No one can make them do that, not even the PA AG.***

***They have to want to see.***

I wrote to Robert W. McElroy, bishop of San Diego.

I wrote to him a year ago to commend him for his statement that was published in *America*.

He wrote to defend James Martin sj for his efforts to help parishes welcome LGBT visitors.

Martin wrote a book, and got hammered in the media.

Some bishops challenged him.

McElroy listed a couple of dozen other very significant concerns (endemic poverty, lack of  
quality health care, the uneven distribution of wealth, nuclear arms and the defense budget,  
racism, and more).

He told all the grumblers: "Wake up."

He wanted everyone, especially his peers, TO SEE.

I'm hoping McElroy will be loaded for bear by the time the November meeting of the Bishops  
comes around, if not before.

I'm hoping he will have the courage to say to his peers exactly the same thing

he has written to his clergy in San Diego, available on the web site:

*"Every bishop in our land bears a collective debt of guilt for these acts of abuse,  
and we must work together to forge not only a new structure,*

*but also a new culture within the life of the Church.”*

I suggested at least two actions to McElroy:

1. A call for an outside special counsel to review all pertinent diocesan files (even those in DC). The counsel will provide grand juries with findings and propose a reconciliation plan to the faithful.
2. Consider a whole new USCCB governance structure that models a board of directors and includes a majority of lay members: men, women, and young adults.

Doris Donnelly, a professor from JCU who was also a member at Historic Saint Peter spoke on WVIZ’s “Ideas” last Monday.

She called for the resignation of all US bishops, just as the 33 bishops from Chile resigned a few months ago when the lights went on in that country.

The pope returned many of them to ministry, *but not all*.

Imagine the same happening here. We’ll see.

I told Bishop McElroy I was born and baptized in San Diego.

I told him I was ordained and married and then *called (not a Catholic word)* to serve again.

If he kept reading, he saw that I believe we have functioned pretty well here for 8 years with a model that details accountability, and we keep the lights on.

I ended my letter to the bishop:

“PA has been a chilling revelation, but all the attorney general did was turn the lights on. Please keep the lights on so all the good the Church has done is not squandered by the bad.”

Joshua asked: “if you will not serve the God of Israel, whom will you serve?”

Jesus asked the disciples if they will stay, in spite of the *harsh* message.

Where can the bishops go now, now that the lights are on?

I think it would be difficult for anyone here to suggest that this is of no concern to us.

Even if there is no canonical link between our assembly and the diocese of Cleveland, at the very least we are all “extended family.”

When we gathered at the font last week, we didn’t have to drag anyone to the water.

But we might need to take another look at some of the words from that *ritual of renewal*.

And nobody here can suggest we are doing anything in the dark.

The words “turn the lights on” are not embedded in our mission statement,

but we could not have found our way from East 17<sup>th</sup> Street to this lovely setting *in the dark*.

Indeed, the very fact that we made that trek in broad daylight is a testimony to the truth:

**the Community that is formed by *living bread* must be protected,  
if need be, even from a bishop.**

*We will keep the lights on.*

If there are enough bishops who trust the Holy Spirit more than a secret handshake,  
If there is enough shame *this time* to move key players to find their voice,  
If there is enough integrity in the Bishops' conference to keep the lights on,  
we may be on the verge of witnessing a death and rising.  
At this point, nothing else will do.

The ship has hit an iceberg, and the consequences could be titanic.

It is the nature of a card house to fall.  
And if that is what the bishops have built, it will come down.

When I saw the oak tree alight yesterday morning, I thought of the *first light* day:  
"Let there be light."  
I say this morning: Let there be light, *from now on*.

*Offered as a reflection on the scriptures for the day and the events on our mind  
Bob Kloos, pastor/administrator for the Community of Saint Peter  
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