

Holy Week, Church Visit, Scandal, and Miracles

29 March 2010 | By Paul | paul@mindparts.org



I knew the Christian season of Lent was going to be challenging this year. It always is. But I had a number of important clues for why this one would stand out from the rest. For one, I have a level of internal awareness now that I have not ever had before. For another, internal parts that have dealt with religious issues have been active to a degree I have not experienced in well over a decade. I have had to attend to them, and since things are different now, the way I attend has taken on new significance.

This religious season did not start out well. And I was quite discouraged. On the very first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, there was a self-harm event that completely caught me off guard. I had somehow not remembered the importance of that day, even though we had talked about it several times in therapy. But parts inside clearly remembered. I then rededicated myself to do better and work more collaboratively to keep "all of me" safe.

My therapist and I have been planning for Easter beginning back at the turn of the year. And, in fact, one of the steps we discussed was going back to the church where a lot of my childhood abuse happened (see photo above). We knew this was a huge step, not to be done without careful consideration. But specific parts were very vocal in asking for it.

We talked about all the pros and cons and thought it through carefully. And we waited and resisted the temptation to do it impulsively. We went together a couple weeks ago. The experience was validating, but there were all kinds of different responses. For the first few days, it was all seen as only a healing experience. But then one younger part thought it meant we can now go back to that church and even participate in the ceremonies (presumably as an altar boy). Other parts, particularly those who dealt with the more extreme conflicts about religion, were not heard from for at least a week. That troubled me. When I did finally hear from them, they were not happy, which is the mildest way I can describe their responses.

Immediately after going to the church, the clergy abuse scandal in Europe escalated. This was not any surprise to those of us who have dealt with this for a long time. But it has been big news for the scandal to reach the steps of the Vatican. The news has seemed relentless to me. As I wrote in [Thoughts on the Catholic Church Abuse Reports](#) a couple weeks ago, I know bringing abuses into the light of day will lead to healing and increased safety of children. But such news has always been destabilizing for me. That it comes right in the middle of the holiest time of the year, makes it even more so.

On March 19th, Pope Benedict read publicly a letter apologizing for abuses in Ireland. Last year, he read a similar letter during his visit to the United States. But the words were typical, saying some bishops made some "errors in judgment." And there were only words, not action. Then on March 24, the New York Times broke a story that the pope, then a cardinal, was the person who stopped church investigations of a Wisconsin priest who was accused of abusing hundreds of boys at a deaf school. The Times article said:

"Even as the pope himself in a recent letter to Irish Catholics has emphasized the need to cooperate with civil justice in abuse cases, the correspondence seems to indicate that the Vatican's insistence on secrecy has often impeded such cooperation. At the same time, the officials' reluctance to defrock a sex abuser shows that on a doctrinal level, the Vatican has tended to view the matter in terms of sin and repentance more than crime and punishment."

Swiss President Doris Leuthard has called for a central register of pedophile priests in her country. We would do well to have one in the United States as well. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there should be a special offender registry in the cases of any civil action of child abuse (in any church or organization, such as the Boy Scouts). There currently exists none. And in the Catholic Church, since civil cases were filed and settled with the Church, there are no civil authority records on most all priests. Most are listed by the non-profit group Bishop Accountability, but that is not the best solution for protecting children. I believe our sex offender registries are a bit of a joke, since someone can be on it for misdemeanor lewd conduct having nothing at all to do with a child, yet a defrocked, civilly sued, pedophile priest with dozens of victims, is not on the registry. That inequity is not in the best interest of protecting children. So, our governments must hold some responsibility in all of this and need to step up.

To slightly change the subject, but to give an idea of how disconnected the Catholic Church is from reality, Pope John Paul II's track to sainthood is being questioned. The

former pope died five years ago. One requirement for sainthood is that there needs to be two attributed miracles. Here's one miracle in his file: A nun in France, had prayed to the pope for relief from what was believed to be Parkinson's disease. Two months after the pope died, she had a medically unexplainable cure. That's probably a miracle to someone, but how is it attributed to him? Recently, there has been news saying that she may not have suffered from Parkinson's at all, but rather another neurological disease which can be cured. Talk about misplaced priorities!

So much is happening at the same time for me. I am being inundated with Catholic Church news, which normally I do not pay much attention to. Inside feels like it is all rushing to a head coinciding with Easter. I have, as a result, been losing lots of time to dissociation, orders of magnitude more than usual. I know I have been psychologically switching self states like a revolving door. I also know that most of the time I am able to show to outsiders (including family) that I appear to be totally normal. This is validating in a sense, because it makes me realize how it was possible for most of my youth. That ability, really, is what dissociation was designed to do (and I will write more about this later).

In the process, safety—that overarching responsibility of mine—is being severely tested. I am trying my best to navigate through all of this muck. I am utilizing all my grounding and coping skills. But I am acutely aware that all of my best efforts may not quite be enough this week.