



The Dark Sea of Scandal

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,” St. Paul tells us. The Jesus Who taught and healed 2000 years ago is the same Jesus Who teaches and heals today in Gospel and Sacrament. The Jesus Who died and rose 2000 years ago is the same Jesus Who hands over His dying and rising to us in the Eucharist and draws us into communion with the Church He founded there and then for here and now. “Behold, I will be with you all days,” He promised, “even to the end of the world.”

But without the one Church He founded, no one would remember this Jesus; within a century of His death His promise would have been forgotten. Without the one Church He founded, history would have no record of His words and deeds in the Gospels which His Spirit inspired the Church to hand down as her own. Without the one Church He founded, the “living water” of sacramental life would not flow into our lives again and again to wash away our sins and set us free.

But the saving waters *do* flow; His saving Word *does* resound; we continue to break bread in memory of Him. Jesus *is* true to His promise to be with us always. In every succeeding generation His Spirit has never let the Church forget her Lord’s leave-taking words: “Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

But from Judas’ dark dealings in the first

century to Theodore McCarrick’s in the twentieth, scandalously unfaithful *Apostolic* self-seeking has betrayed faithful transmission of the Gospel time and again. Five hundred years ago, it was no secret that long-standing, deeply entrenched corruption permeated the highest levels of Catholicism. Protestants surveyed the damage and concluded that the Church was incapable of reform and recovery; so they broke away from Catholic unity to establish new churches free from scandal. But breaking Catholic unity did not suffice to fashion Protestant unity. Divisions multiplied and hardened among the baptismal heirs of the Lord Who willed all to be one.

This deeply saddening development had been foreseen long before in the Gospel of John. When Jesus said He would give His Body to feed us and His Blood to be our drink, many of His disciples reacted sharply—“How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”—and many of them “drew back and no longer walked with Him.” From that day to this the Mystery of the Eucharist was a deal-breaker. “Will you also go away?” a disappointed Jesus asked his Apostles. From that day to this the Church has found its voice in St. Peter’s response: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Peter’s question confronts every Catholic who comes under pressure to “go away” from Jesus’ unsparing demands on our minds and hearts, to depart from communion with Him in the Church He empowered His Apostles to build. But when we walk away from communion with the Church, what are we saying to the Jesus Who entrusted His words and His sacraments to her bishops and saints? Has His promise to be with His Church to the end of the world

ceased to be true? Can He Who is The Truth be entangled in a tissue of lies?

As we sail into the dark, storm-tossed sea of the scandal of episcopal betrayal, we do well to bear in mind Jesus' promise in the Gospel of John: "If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."