This version of the homily includes other inserts while delivering the homily during Mass. There were also copies available at church doors. But those copies do not include the adlibbed passages that are in this version. There is nothing substantially different between the two versions. This one is closer to what was actually said from the pulpit.

I have this adage, “Adults can talk about anything. So long as we talk about it like adults.” Once again, it is necessary to address the horrible scandals of sexual abuse in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. I have addressed this issue at least four times in the past eight years from the pulpit and also times before that. This homily will utilize sections from previous homilies, but develop other points more relevant to the current headlines.

Over the years, a few parishioners have said to me, “If victims had been silent for so long, why speak up now? Why not simply remain quiet and spare the church bad press?” Only when victims came forward, did the church have the opportunity to transform, heal, and exact justice. Only when victims came forward, could the light of day finally shatter the darkness of abuse and stop more from becoming victims.

The church was not abused when victims came forward. Rather, the church was abused when they were assaulted. Young children, adolescents, and adults are “the church” and when they were abused, the whole church was violated. Victims need to come forward whenever they are ready to. We need to encourage them to speak out as soon as they are able.

We know that it often takes decades for a victim of sexual abuse to come forward and tell their story, regardless if the abuser was a clergy person, teacher, family member, or stranger. Many never come forward, but remain in painful silence for the rest of their lives. The abuse is horribly damaging, leaving victims buried with guilt and shame, even though they have done nothing wrong. It often leads to drug and alcohol abuse; and can seriously hinder their ability to live in healthy relationships.

For purpose of this homily, it is sufficient to say, in our diocese and in dioceses across the United States, significant changes have occurred over the thirty-two + years since I have been ordained. Most of all these changes occurred after 2002, following the unfolding of abuse cases in the Archdiocese of Boston. What made this issue different from other issues?

I have said from many pulpits in this diocese, including the Cathedral, “The American bishops finally responded appropriately to sexual abuse in their dioceses not because they saw the light but rather because they felt the heat. If not for freedom of the press and an independent judiciary, we might still not know the extent of sexual abuse and its many incidences. In other words, ‘Thank God for The Boston Globe’!”

From 2002 to now, the changes have been revolutionary and extensive. This is the result of The Dallas Charter, named for an emergency meeting of all the Catholic bishops of our nation held in Dallas, Texas in 2002. There they agreed on a far-reaching plan to address the abuse crisis. For an institution considered a slow moving boat that thinks in centuries, the Roman Catholic Church at least in this country experienced rapid, far-reaching and all-encompassing changes. The slow moving boat did a complete about face in short period of time.

Here are only some examples:
The screening of candidates for priesthood has become more extensive and covering every aspect of human development and interaction. Particularly, the process looks for emotional maturity in a man who has healthy and active adult friendships.

Once ordained, every priest and deacon is held to a strict Code of Ethics determining the proper and improper ways of interacting with parishioners, and all people coming into our circle of life. This Code is updated from time to time if determined something was not conclusively written or some new situation has arisen. That Code of Ethics is taken seriously from Kittery to Fort Kent and every stop in between.

Every accusation of abuse or violation of human dignity is treated with high and serious response. Retired career law enforcement officials conduct investigations of the accusations. If the accusations involve violations of law, the appropriate civil authorities are immediately contacted.

Finally, there are national agencies, specializing in these issues, auditing every diocese in the United States on a continual basis. Our diocese has always received the highest rank of compliance with almost every audit.

As far as I know, this is also true of all six Pennsylvania dioceses mentioned in the Grand Jury investigation. They have implemented all these changes and are audited regularly. Why they waited so long to open their older personnel files is beyond me. All of our files were opened in 2002 and given over to the Maine State Attorney General’s Office. Every priest, all of our personnel records were given to the AG’s office and someone there went through every one of them with a fine tooth comb. This should have happened everywhere.

Even with all the good work that has been done and is being done, here are issues for the laity to be aware of.

The Church Needs Better Awareness of Adults as Victims of Abuse. Most all of the discussion above relates to abuse of minors, those under the age of 18. They represent the most horrific abuses in the Catholic Church and the thousands of instances just in our own country over the past 70 years is simply infuriating and heart-breaking.

The Church is also now getting a better understanding that adults, violated by clergy, are also victims. The former Archbishop McCarrick scandal is such an example. So often, Catholic bishops refer to these transgressions as “violations of celibacy” considering this involves “consenting adults”. But “celibacy” and “consenting adults” are not the issues here, and the offense is far more serious. The issue is one of “abuse of power” and “exploitation of the vulnerable”. These are far greater sins. Let me explain.

Healing professions depend on solid professional boundaries governing their relationships with those seeking their healing or other assistance. Such healing professions include: doctors, lawyers, counselling therapists, occupational therapists, etc. This obviously also includes religious and spiritual leaders as well. These relationships are of unequal power; whereby the patient, client, or congregation member place themselves in a vulnerable state with the professional. Other similar relationships covered by these boundaries would include: teacher/student, employer/employee, supervisor/laborer.

This remains true even if both parties are adults, single, and in religions that do not require celibacy for their ministers. For example, if a single Methodist pastor, not bound by celibacy, becomes involved sexually with an employee of her/his church staff, or a member of her/his congregation, that pastor would be fired by church authorities. Professional boundaries have been violated. It is always the professional’s (doctor, lawyer, clergy person, teacher, etc.) responsibility to maintain the professional boundaries under all circumstances. PERIOD!
Violation of these boundaries further weakens society’s need for healing, justice, and healthy human relationships. Violations also scar and wound the life of those seeking help or place themselves in someone’s care. Most all professional organizations have clear ethical codes forbidding such relationships, and they need to be strictly enforced. The issue of celibacy is unrelated to this event.

**Beware of ideological agendas.** Many on the Church’s left single out mandatory celibacy as the root problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. Many on the Church’s right single out priests who have a gay sexual orientation as the root problem. Neither of these suggested root causes are backed up by reality.

Each suggested root cause may have some *indirect impact* on the issue of sexual abuse. The Church may well decide to have honest conversations on mandatory celibacy in ordained priesthood, and the presence of men with a gay sexual orientation. But when discussing sexual abuse of minors or adults, these issues are a distraction, and do not assist in addressing the core issues that allowed these abusive priests to continue abusing in the church’s life.

Please remember in almost every discovery of abuse in a particular presbyterate, the number of abusing priests amounted to 5% of the entire presbyterate. This was true in Boston and in most of the Pennsylvania dioceses. Let me be clear: because those 5% were protected by a shroud of secrecy and cover-up, they wrecked horrific havoc on a scale far more devastating than if proper and appropriate actions were taken. This resulted in tragedy and suffering throughout the church.

But, the remaining 95% were not abusive. All were celibate and many remaining faithful were also of a gay sexual orientation. 95% should tell us that neither celibacy nor gay priests are root causes for this horrible crisis. While many of us struggle with celibacy at various times in our priesthood, most all of us also remain faithful to promises that were made.

**Beware of clericalism.** So where do we look to further address this horrible crisis? The voices that have spoken with integrity, clarity, and wisdom all focus on “clericalism” as a significant root cause.

“Clericalism” views priesthood as “apart” from the rest of the church, and living a life beyond and detached from everyone else. This leads to a closed and insular culture void of transparency and accountability. Clericalism happens when we hide our insecurities and immaturities behind the Roman collar. We all have our insecurities and immaturities. When we hide them behind the Roman collar, demons rush in.

I have written what I consider to be three confusions in the Roman Catholic priesthood that either flow from and/or contribute to clericalism. The three confusions: “Piety for Holiness”, “Loyalty for Fidelity”, “Being a Company Man” with “Being a Man of the Church”.

----We confuse “piety” for “holiness”. Holiness and piety are certainly not mutually exclusive. But being pious does not in and of itself amount to holiness. I have known amazingly holy people that were also pious in their demeanor. I have also known very pious people, but their piety was a veneer of the brutally abusive people they really were. Holiness is born of generous and humble service following in the footsteps of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Holiness treats every person with the God given dignity and respect they deserve, and maintains proper professional boundaries in pastoral care. Look again at the second reading, *The Letter of St. James*. He says, “If you want perfect religion, take care of the poor and keep yourself uncorrupted.” Holiness comes only from love.

---We confuse “loyalty” for “fidelity”. The bishops and other church leaders in the past that covered-up these abusive priests, transferring them from parish to parish, and silencing victims believed they were being loyal to the institutional church and to the ordained priesthood. But there was little to no room for “fidelity” to the
greater truths and transcendent realities. “Loyalty” to the institution is always overruled by “fidelity” to The Kingdom of God. The church is servant to the Kingdom.

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We confuse being a “company man” with being a “man of the Church”. This is related to the second confusion, but ultimately sees priesthood as a “career” rather than a “vocation”. It is a “self-serving career” rather than a “self-emptying vocation” in the image of Christ. Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis repeatedly condemned “careerist” attitude among clerics.

These confusions emanating from clericalism are creeping back into the Church’s life. Ironically, they are promoted by good people convinced these seemingly better models from the past are a correct response to the sexual abuse crisis. The effort to re-create a model of priesthood from the past, that was believed to be a holier model, will, unintentionally, set up the church for another crisis or scandal to happen again. What might be a sign of this return? As a friend of mine commented on a seminarian in her parish many years ago, “He was the oldest young man I ever met.” If they look young but act old, you may be looking at a “piety” disconnected from “holiness”. You may be looking at clericalism.

We know many have left the Catholic Church because of these scandals. I have no right to judge or criticize them. But let me tell you why I remain. These are words written to a friend of mine who had written to explain why he was leaving. I have further developed this response for this homily. “Yet, for today, I choose to remain. I don’t remain because there is no place for me to go and nothing else for me to do. I don’t remain being only six years from retirement and so will bide my time until then. And I don’t remain only because of promises made over thirty-two years ago, although they remain very important in my life.

“I remain because in the heart of the church, I have discovered “Love”. A Love greater than all the gaping, putrid, and heinous wounds inflicted by those with power and the ability to stop further wounds. This Love has grabbed me, turned my life inside out and is the compelling motivation to get out of bed every morning, sinner though I still am. In many ways, I am still here because you are here, present in this church for this Mass for the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time. One of the greatest miracles of them all is every weekend, we open the doors to the churches and in you come. Your faith encourages, consoles, and strengthens me. If we open the doors and no one comes in, that will be the day to make another decision.

“I don’t know where this Love was during the sex abuse crisis, or the Holocaust or Hiroshima, Nagasaki or the attacks of 9-11. Explaining those horrors are way above my pay scale. I believe the Church is still in the hands of God, and The Holy Spirit is moving forcefully through the Church for purification and transformation. I can’t tell you what will happen next week or even tomorrow. All I have is today, and today I remain.”