

Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 24, 2022
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
116 Theodore Street
Scranton, PA 18508
Luke 11:1-13

God's mercy is such that He would not have destroyed Sodom if He could have found just ten righteous persons in the city. Keeping in mind St. Paul's admonition that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, the Lord was not searching for ten sinless persons, but rather ten persons who had not become embroiled in what the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes in paragraph 2357 as "acts of grave depravity." Sodom is, after all, the origin in the English language of the word sodomy.

What this incident teaches us concerns more than that such behavior calls out to heaven for vengeance from God. That's obvious from the end of Sodom, which was fire and brimstone, when god could not find even ten people who had not succumbed to depravity. We learn also something about the nature of sin, that when it becomes acceptable, or when no proscriptions are made against it, disobedience to God's law spreads and comes to ensnare nearly everyone. Not every town was like Sodom. The outcry against it was so great because perverse sin had been permitted to fester, and the result was a city in which the citizens wanted to violate even the visiting angels from God.

We have seen this principle in action in our own country, particularly within the past few years. If we look at the cities which descended into chaos during the summer of 2020, much of the disorder can be linked to the lack of a firm response to the looting, burning, and killing that began first in Minneapolis. As unrestrained violence was permitted in city after city, we saw the phenomenon spread as people saw accurately that few would suffer consequences for acts of wanton destruction. And so this sin spread. This is in contrast to the riots in Los Angeles in 1992, which I also watched unfold on television. Thirty years ago the President had the courage to call into Los Angeles County the Seventh Infantry Division of the U.S. Army and the First Marine Division of the U.S. Marine Corps; and those riots ended within days. Order was restored, and the sin did not spread.

The difference today is that for a large segment of the population, what is good for our children is no longer obvious. Jesus asks rhetorically in today's Gospel, "*What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent, or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?*" The answer then was that no one does that, so we see the absurdity in such a gross lack of charity. But today, so many children are receiving serpents and scorpions instead of the fish and eggs they asked for that the whole culture is confused about what is good for our children. Sin has built upon sin to such a degree that many parents now look desperately for environments for their children that have not descended into complete disorder.

In this regard, Scranton has a lot for which to commend itself. Our city, indeed, our entire metropolitan area, was not afflicted by the chaos of two summers ago. We aren't immune to gang

violence as the recent murder on Providence Road amply demonstrated; but we do have the lowest rate of violent crime of all the one hundred ten largest metropolitan areas in the country. The majority of the population here still knows left from right and up from down. That's why so many people are leaving places like New York and Philly and moving here, voting with their feet.

However, such ordered tendencies must be fostered if they are to survive in a culture that seems to want to offend God and invite the destruction that Sodom suffered. We can do our part personally by ordering our speech and our conduct in a way beyond reproach, that is, in a way that accords with God's objective will. We will give our children only fish and eggs, never serpents and scorpions, even if they should learn from the culture that they should be asking for serpents and scorpions. We'll simply refuse to give such things to them because we desire life for them, not death. We'll give what God wants for them, not what the world would have them suffer.

We will also foster proper order in the way we form our parish and run our school. We will rule out of hand the insanity that prevails in too many quarters of American society and will insist that there are certain matters that are not open for discussion and to entertain them is to invite division. As the Holy See did this past week in regard to the Church chaos in Germany, we will say that advocacy of falsehood ensures that our institutions will "rot and die." Since we don't want to "rot and die," we'll stick to the Truth. Our goal in this, of course, is heaven, but we must simultaneously desire to avoid the fate of Sodom. Let it never be said that at St. Thomas More Parish not even ten righteous persons could be found. It should rather be our reputation that those made righteous here in the Blood of the Lamb are innumerable, and this is the expectation for all members.

Nor do I expect that the order we preserve here will be due to our own striving. Jesus says in the Gospel today that God desires to give us his Holy Spirit and that if we ask, we shall receive, that if we seek, we shall find. Therefore, we must pray that the Lord will maintain our righteousness and that He will keep us clear-sighted in order that we may always discern truth from falsehood and distinguish between the light and the darkness. It is He who has given us all these precious gifts, so in clinging to Him and abiding in the Truth that He has revealed, our parish will continue to be a well-ordered oasis in the midst of a world that is falling apart.