Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Aug.26 – Scandal

Joshua 24:1-2,15-18

Psalm 34

Ephesians 5:21-32

John 6: 60-69

After reading that second reading from Ephesians, we discover there is “an elephant in the room.” “Wives should be subordinate to their husbands…”

That comes right out of a patriarchal society. Men and women? There was no equality. In that patriarchal society framework, men held the position of power and authority in politics, in leadership and in families.

So St. Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians in that framework. The twist, the Christian twist, is that in marriage, the situation between husband and wife is self-sacrificing love – one to the other. So men, in a relationship, don’t expect your slippers and a beer by ringing a bell, all things being equal. Partners in a Christian relationship look out for one another, respect one another, and open their relationship so others can share in their commitment, dedication, self-sacrifice, and love. The marriage relationship is to allow the love of God to show through. St. Paul would choose his words more carefully in today’s society.

Now, stemming from our First and Gospel readings, thank you for making the right choice. You are here in church. Church means a self-sacrificing Christian community. You have chosen to gather around His book and His table to gain direction, consolation, and sustenance for your lives. You have come away to God’s house.

Now about the “snake in the room”.

The Church’s structure is paternalistic. A “Father Knows Best” kind of world. All authority is situated in the priest. He’s the boss. With that statement, “He’s the boss”, our paternalism has devolved into clericalism. All authority resides in the priest. Others may share in that authority, but the buck stops in the rectory. Everyone looks up to the pastor. That’s because in clericalism, a priest is put high up on a pedestal. And if a certain type of person stands on that pedestal and assumes all authority and power, well we know how power corrupts.

What about the capo de tuti capo – the Pope? Yes, there has been authoritarian clerics who have sat on the throne of St. Peter. The Pope’s title, however, is “The Servant of the Servants of God.”

Some clerics deem themselves as little popes – little popes who stand ram-rod straight on that pedestal and who lap up the luxury of absolute power. What would Jesus say about that?

The Church has to re-evaluate the idea of who a priest is and his place among the servants of God.

If a priest is a good person, nothing special about that. We are all called to be good as Christians. The grace, the talents, the vocations we all have are to be shared in a self-sacrificing way. And, yes, appreciated to the full. In clericalism, the priest is put on a pedestal as somebody extraordinary just because he is a priest. And clericalism puts that pedestal way up over all people.

What if the priest on that pedestal is not a good person? There must be a reckoning. He should not be given the benefit of the doubt just because he is on a pedestal. That is clericalism.

If the priest has done wrong, the priest must make amends. The Church must see to it that he is not placed in a position where there are temptations to him again.

If the priest has alledgedly committed a crime, he must be arrested and brought to justice.

If a priest is a snake in the grass, his clerical collar must be removed with extreme prejudice. There is no room is God’s house for a snake in the grass.

Clericalism will try to cover up those priests who go bad. “Father can do no wrong. He is a priest after all.” That is clericalism at all costs.

So let’s get rid of all priests like Shakespeare wanted to do with all lawyers.

No.

To be a priest is a charism – a vocation that is a gift from God. Just as marriage is a charism – a gift from God. A priest has a place in the house of God.

Get rid of celibacy? No. There are many wonderful people who are single and have that charism. Celibacy and priesthood, I would think however, are two different charisms.

Women priests? What is to stop clericalism from invading that situation also?

So today there has been a “Spotlight” put onto the dark corners of God’s house. We have discovered snakes. May the grace of St. Patrick do its thing.

It’s a paternalistic, clericalistic world in which we live. We have forgotten that we are all called to be the “Servants of the Servants of God.” Blessed Mother Teresa help us.