The Church, *at it’s best*, follows two very simple precepts at its foundation – *love God, and flowing from that, love your neighbour –* two things that come from a heart transformed in Christ. The readings today are quite challenging, but very poignant. In the gospel, Jesus is chastising the religious authorities for focusing too much on the ‘*outward*’ signs of their piety, while at the same time hiding the evil intentions within their hearts. He labels them hypocrites, and ***calls a spade a spade*** – “*This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*” They had abandoned those two foundational precepts.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that this gospel passage comes up today, as it is so relevant to the current situation that we find ourselves in as a Church, given the shocking revelations that have come forth concerning clergy sexual abuse as detailed in the Grand Jury Report from Pennsylvania about the cases there, and further allegations of collusion and cover ups by those in leadership. In the gospel we hear today, I have no doubt that Jesus is speaking directly to us *today*, that those involved in the evil of the abuses perpetrated have not only betrayed the people of God in the worst possible ways, but they have betrayed Christ, His Gospel, and His Church.

Many of you have expressed your own frustration, anger, and disillusionment - I share those sentiments as well, and today I will attempt to do address this current situation from my own personal perspective. But first, I will read a letter from Bishop Crosby which he has asked to have read at all parishes in the Diocese:

[[Link to Bishop’s Letter](https://hamiltondiocese.com/news/2018/August/letter-from-his-excellency-bishop-crosby)] - links to this letter, our Sexual Misconduct Policy, and Pope Francis’ letter are available on our website.

For me personally, it’s been a tough few weeks to be a priest. It’s been a tough few weeks to be a Catholic. As it has for many of you, the news that seems to keep coming out has *shaken me to my core*, and I have to be honest – for the first time in my priesthood, I have felt *ashamed* of being a priest because of the association with the evil perpetrated by my brother priests around the world who, like me, have been ordained to represent Christ in this world. Don’t get me wrong – I love my priesthood, and I don’t doubt my vocation – but I have to admit, it’s been a little harder of late to put on the collar, and I know for many of you, it has been much more difficult to identify as a Catholic.

Last week I was away on vacation, and I have to say that the detailed revelations of abuse out of Pennsylvania hung over me like a dark cloud – so much so that I felt I had to go for a couple of days to the Martyrs Shrine in Midland for a time of personal retreat to process everything, to pray for the victims, and to pray in all honesty a prayer that I’m sure is on all of our hearts, ‘*Lord,* *how could this happen?*’

I didn’t leave with a complete answer, but I did leave with a clear sense that the Church that I love – the Church that we all love is *Christ’s* Church. We may have been failed by some in leadership of the earthly *institution* oftheChurch, but the Church that Christ founded and handed down to us is the Church of Jesus that still gives us *hope*.

It’s not the clergies’ Church; it’s not the bishops’ Church; it’s not even the Pope’s Church – it’s ***our*** Church – we are the *true body of Christ*, and our faith isn’t in our leaders, but in Jesus Christ who is *our foundation*. And we recall again that the Church *at it’s best* is boiled down to two things – **love God, and love neighbour**. Some in the *institution* of the Church have strayed grievously from these two precepts, but as I was preaching about earlier this summer before this news came out, it’s time to get back to the *basics* of our faith so that the Church can be *at its best*.

The only remedy for bad priests, are *good* priests. Pray for me and all priests. The only remedy for bad bishops are *good* bishops. Pray for Bishop Crosby, all bishops and Pope Francis during these trying times. The only remedy for bad Catholics are *good* Catholics – pray for each other, that we may all focus on the basics to grow closer to Christ – **Love God** by getting to know Him, and **love neighbour** through humble service. That is the Church *at it’s best*.

And that is why I believe that what we do here at St. Michael’s is so *important*, and more important now than ever. We are called to be the Church *at its best*. I pledge to you my renewed commitment as a priest, that I will double-down and work tirelessly to serve the parish in my day-to-day pastoral work and in the proclamation of the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ, and the *joy* that comes through a life in Him.

And at a time like this when it’s so easy to focus on the negative, we need to remind ourselves of the *good* that we do as a Church, right here in our parish – Our St. Vincent de Paul Society working to serve the poor in our own community; Our Africa Committee, and all the children we’ve sponsored through the Harambee Project; Our Refugee Committee, and the many families we’ve been able to help; Our Social Justice Committee; our CWL; Knights of Columbus; our Grief Support team; all of our dedicated volunteers that serve at our nursing homes and visits to the homebound; the outreach to our University students; everyone who serves here at our liturgies to help raise our hearts and minds to God in worship; the list goes on, and that, my friends is *the Church at its best*, and I’m proud to be your pastor.

The words of St. James we hear today in the 2nd reading have really resonated with me this week, and are worth closing with: “*Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*” Today, let us of course pledge our prayerful support for victims of abuse and their families, and let us also pledge to be the authentic witnesses to Christ that our Lord asks of us in loving God and neighbor. *Let us be the Church at its best*.