

## THE 800 POUND GORILLA

“Okay everyone, let’s top off the coffee cups, grab another one of Sam’s terrific goodies, and take our seats.”

Filling his cup, Ben stirs in some cream and takes a sip.

“Oh, and before you do,” he says, turning his attention back to the room, “please stop at the front table and pick up a course outline on the front table One we’ll follow, loosely.”

Looking at each other, Ben and Joey chuckle in unison. They’ve been doing this long enough to know ‘loosely’ is appropriate as these classes tend to take on a life of their own.

“Father Bob has some words of introduction as to the scope of what the next weeks will entail,” Joey says.

“So, let’s get this show on the road...”

**Tony here. We are at an early session of this year’s RCIA class. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the process of receiving adult converts and “reverts” into the Catholic Church. Reverts, by the way, is the term we use for those baptized in the Church, but have been away for some time.**

**Several years ago, the name was altered to OCIA; the O meaning order. But RCIA is so ingrained in the minds of many and I guess the powers to be figure “no harm, no foul” in this case.**

**With everybody finally settled, St. Katherine's pastor steps to the head of the room.**

*Let's listen in...*

**“On behalf of myself, Father John, the staff here at St. Kate's, and especially Ben and Joey, I'd like to welcome you all to this years RCIA class.**

**“A few words about the program. Through the course of this program, we will present the basic knowledge you'll need in order to make a well thought out decision as to whether you wish to embrace the Catholic faith if you so choose. And please know you are under no obligation to go any further in this program, than you are comfortable. If down the road you feel the Catholic Church is not for you, please feel no shame in following your conscience. We won't be insulted. And if you do leave, know you are free to come back at any time. You will most certainly leave as a friend.**

**“This program allows you to enter the church with a basic understanding of the faith. Notice I said, basic. Living and learning the Catholic faith is a lifelong process. I don't know of any priest who would tell you he learned everything there is to know the day he was ordained. And I know these two guys have told me not a class goes by without them learning something new from you, the students.**

**“So, any questions, so far?**

**A hand goes up.**

**“Yes, Devin?”**

**“I know my question might make some people uncomfortable, but I have to ask it, and I think here at the beginning is the right place to ask it.”**

**“Okaaay ...” Father says ... “and your question is...?”**

**From his tone, somehow, I think the pastor has an idea what’s coming.**

**“Well, I don’t want to waste anyone’s time going forward with these classes. I’m trying to decide whether I want to become a part of this church, or actually, any church. And please understand; I don’t mean to offend anyone, but given we keep hearing about scandals and cover-ups in the Catholic Church, why would I want to join?”**

**An air of tension mixed with anticipation fills the class. The eight-hundred-pound gorilla just made its appearance.**

**Setting his coffee cup on the desk, Father Bob looks straight at Devin.**

**“Devin, no, no offense; it’s a fair question; one that needs to be addressed,” he says. “So, thank you for asking.”**

**“So, the best way I can address it is offer you this.”**

**Almost in unison, the class shuffles in their seats.**

**“Unfortunately, there’s a new category of Catholics. Call them the ‘Dones’; as in done with the Catholic Church,” And it’s sad, because, while some allegations are valid, they have been presented as widely occurring in every diocese and parish in the land. And that’s just not true.**

**“Now, it’s a problem; no one denies that. Collectively, we are embarrassed, and to varying degrees, outraged. One incidence of that behavior, is one too many.**

**“So, to be absolutely clear, in no way do Ben, Joey, Father John, or I, or any faithful member of the clergy, or member of the Catholic church at large, defend anyone found to be complicit or actively involved in the abuse of another, be it a child, a teenager, or a grown adult; man or woman.”**

**“So why did it happen?” Roy Sanders asks.**

**“Well, historically, things of that nature were handled ‘in-house.’ They often never saw the light of day. Today, however, given technology and the media, things once kept under wraps, now do see the light of day, almost immediately. And not just scandals, but almost everything coming from the Church. And honestly, that’s a good thing. If there is anything Satan hates, it’s the light of day.”**

**“Then why do you persist in your belief in this church?” Melissa Stargell asks. “As a mother of two small boys, it angers and frightens me this sort of behavior could come from those charged with the healthy spiritual growth of the children in their care.”**

**Nodding in agreement, Father Bob lightly shrugs his shoulders. “I understand your anguish, Melissa. In answer, first I would say, again, the problem isn’t as widespread as everyone’d been led to believe.**

**“And, secondly, I offer you this. In my lifetime I have seen the murder of a President of the United States, in addition to lust, greed, arrogance, theft, and every other evil imaginable committed by those people charged with the governance of our**

country. But does that make the United States, and what it stands for, inherently evil and hopelessly corrupt?”

A very small shake of her head is Melissa’s reply.

“So, what’s the church doing about it?” Roy Sanders asks.

“Well, in our country, in two thousand two, the bishops, meeting in Dallas, unanimously passed a resolution, saying if an allegation is found credible, the perpetrator is immediately removed from his duties, and the civil authorities are notified if and when civil law has been violated. Due to that Dallas Resolution as it is called, for the most part, anything you hear nowadays is almost always something that occurred in the past.

“Additionally, some seminaries that educate and train priests were found to be lax in their background investigation of candidates.” Joey adds. “That situation has been cleaned up.”

“And the problem is solved?” Susan Mantle asks.

“Well, Susan, no one can say for sure there won’t be another incident. Satan doesn’t quit. But again, by and large, it is not going on in the modern-day church; at least here in America.”

“How about the rest of the world?”

“Well, all I can say is the Vatican wants it cleaned up, everywhere. Now.”

“Aren’t there instances of this in other Christian churches, public schools, places like that,” Barbara Larsen asks.

Nodding his head, Father Bob agrees. “Yes, Barbara, that’s true. But I have to credit the Church in taking the high road

and not trying pass off our situation by saying ‘look at others ... we aren’t the only ones.’”

“Will there be further instances of abuse?” The priest asks, rhetorically. “Possibly; again, sin doesn’t take a vacation. But the wolf can’t hide anymore. As Joey alluded to; seminaries are far more diligent in their admission procedures. And at the local level, given the policies and safeguards now in place, any such behavior is, and will be, very rare.

“And another thing. A problem for the church in the United States is that our nation is a democracy. The Catholic church is not; not that there is anything wrong with our democracy.”

“Are you kidding?” Mike DeCastro chuckles. “Haven’t you been reading the papers lately, Father?”

A murmur of suppressed laughter runs through the class.

“... well, at least in theory if not practice,” Bob says somewhat sheepishly.

Sipping his coffee, he continues.

“We as Americans cherish our rights, especially freedoms of expression, the press, and the ability to choose our leaders. The Catholic church is different. We don’t vote for those who run the church, what they teach, and the doctrines we believe. Because of this, the church doesn’t always get a fair shake. The press is quick to jump on a scandalous story; unfortunately, it is not so quick to report the scandalous story has no basis. I urge you, when encountering any discussion of this topic, to remember Saint Paul’s words. ‘Examine all things; keep that which is good.’”

The class sits quiet. No hands are raised. I think Father Bob, as always, addressed the concerns well.

“So, if there are not further questions,” he says, “let’s call it a night. See you next week, same time, same station.”