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**Retreat 4 – 04.12.2025**

### **Meditation on Matthew 7:21, 24-27**

‘Great was the fall’ (Matthew 7:27). This passage from today's Gospel is likely to resonate with many church leaders, as it hints at a profound experience shared by many countries worldwide. The Church, once a respected partner in politics and society, has lost and continues to lose prestige, recognition, acceptance, and consequently influence and opportunities to shape policy because of the exposure of abuse cases and its handling of them within its sphere of responsibility. The Church has exposed itself to vulnerability and is thus risking its own mission to follow Jesus. The blame is not on the ‘evil’ press that reports abuse cases; nor on “evil” people who believe nothing or hold differing beliefs; nor on ‘evil’ politicians who, admittedly, use the Church’s situation for their own gains in the power game. The blame rests solely with the Church itself. Those claiming to hold the truth, to morally judge and reprimand others, to impose rules and prohibitions, and to serve as a sign and instrument for the world, should at least not make such serious errors in handling abuse cases, as has often happened.

The key failure of the Church in handling abuse cases is clearly outlined in today's Gospel. It is the gap between words and actions, with several examples illustrating this: One cannot repeatedly tell others about their sins and call for repentance and penance, then, when it involves reprehensible acts by priests or members of religious orders, refuse to show repentance and instead move straight to forgiveness and forgetfulness. One cannot claim to support the vulnerable, the poor, and the marginalised, yet neglect concrete measures against grave abuses within the Church during proper investigations. At the expense of the vulnerable and marginalised, a veil of silence is cast over acts of abuse, all to keep the Church’s reputation spotless. One cannot see themselves as a community of brothers and sisters while ruthlessly shielding some who have committed abuse at others’ expense. One cannot merely speak of chastity as an ideal without sincerely addressing and confronting the issues related to this ideal within their own ranks in the face of abuse cases.

Perhaps it would help to lower the standards slightly? If one does this consistently and thoroughly enough, it should be possible to find a balance between standards and reality, between words and actions. The sharp fall from the heights of self-illusion to the ground of reality can be softened. Will this work? Some are attempting to do so by trying to relativise what has happened and is happening within the Church's sphere of responsibility regarding abuse. They point out that many, if not most, cases of abuse do not occur within the Church but outside it. They also note that other institutions, clubs, and associations deal with abuse in

exactly the same way. But is that really the answer? Essentially, this would amount to accepting the image of today's Gospel, the house built on sand.

Is that enough? Certainly not, when we consider what our Lord Jesus Christ expects of us: to be the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13) and the light of the world (Mt 5:14), in other words, to be a prophetic Church. This also means setting higher standards for ourselves than for everyone else. This does not mean there will be no abuse within the Church with 100% certainty. It would be presumptuous to claim this because no one can absolutely control another person or see into their innermost being. We cannot prevent abuse 100%. However, we can make a sincere effort to prevent abuse within the Church's sphere of responsibility and, if it does happen, to handle it consistently and properly.

But this requires a solid foundation. It requires a clear confession of Jesus Christ as our Lord and a genuine willingness to act accordingly. The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord must include a firm intention to be determined and guided by him. He is our Lord, our role model, and at the same time our judge when it comes to dealing with cases of abuse appropriately. We must compare our words and deeds with his words and deeds in his dedication to the weak, the vulnerable, and the injured. If we succeed in achieving unity here, then we are not only helping to build a just society but also the coming Kingdom of God, the house of the Lord, his Church, of which it can and will be said, as it is said in today's Gospel: it 'did not fall'.

### **Prayer**

Jesus Christ, You are the friend of the oppressed and tormented. Lead us out of our sluggishness with the power of Your Spirit. Let us do what we say and say what we believe, so that we may be credible witnesses to You. Grant us the grace to recognise where we fall short and the opportunity to return to communion with You in word and deed.

### **Question**

What is the relationship between words and deeds in my faith? To what extent do they correspond? Where are the greatest discrepancies?

