

# Avoiding extremes



“Fasten your seat belts. It’s going to be a bumpy night.” That famous line from Bette Davis’ feisty character in the classic 1950 film “All About Eve” can certainly be applied to what we’ve experienced and continue to experience in the Catholic Church. We’ve had plenty of rough and bumpy times connected to the abuse crisis – so troubling that it’s causing many Catholics to have extreme reactions that aren’t helping matters, to say the least.

Certainly, it’s natural to have moments of heartache or despair. Given the headlines over the last several months, who doesn’t, on occasion, want to just head for the hills? But those feelings of frustration or disgust should not be allowed to consume us to the point where we find ourselves swinging from one end of the emotional pendulum to the other, allowing our feelings to take over and rendering us pretty much helpless, hopeless or even reckless in our approach to the ongoing crisis.

Unfortunately, far too many Catholics I’ve come in contact with are exhibiting these types of behaviors. On the one hand there are those who are spending so much of their time on websites full of all gloom and doom that they’ve become convinced there are no longer any good religious left in the Church or that there is a conspiracy and a cover-up in virtually every Catholic corner. They have lost complete trust in the hierarchy and as a result, as Msgr. Charles Pope commented in a recent blog for the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. (“What Good Can Come Out of 2018?”), they’re part of a laity “that is so bold as to be incorrigible, unteachable and disrespectful of clergy and bishops.” It’s their way or the highway, so to speak.

There are other extremes as well. One where folks say, "God's got this." They have convinced themselves that this approach shows ultimate trust. Any efforts to speak up for victims, or respectfully write or reach out to those in Church authority, are viewed as disrespectful and not having a strong enough faith. But Christians are never called to sit by and do nothing simply because we trust God can handle it.

And yet one more extreme response is the "if they don't care, we shouldn't care" approach. One blatant example of this came from a recent listener of mine as the bishops were in the middle of their prayer retreat in the Chicago area. I encouraged listeners to pray for all the bishops to help them approach the abuse issues with renewed strength and dedication in the months and years ahead. This one particular listener wasn't buying the prayer suggestion at all, and reading between the lines, it was quite clear he felt very justified in his decision.

"You just told us we should pray for the bishops and their meeting," he wrote. "However, I've heard only half the bishops have shown up in Chicago for the retreat."

Mind you, this man gave no attribution at all for his statement regarding the alleged attendance numbers of bishops, but it was all he needed to basically say "the heck with them and the Church."

Even if what he "heard" were true, as I said to him in my response, what in the world did that have to do with the proverbial tea in China? I went on to suggest that he pray hard for those who were attending and harder for those who for whatever reason couldn't be there.

Whatever we're feeling, we need to realize that if we truly love Christ and his Church, we're in this for the long haul. Let's fasten our seat belts so we can manage bumps in the road, and in the end be able to stand before Jesus and say we

tried.

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