



**Ways Out of No Way:
An Appeal to Pope Francis
*A fifteen-minute plan addressing the abuse
crisis that never ends***

By Jim O'Shea, CP

The 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – A Time to Choose

The Gospel of John always brings us to a mystical encounter with Jesus and the Reign of the Father. Today we find ourselves in this extraordinary moment of choice for the disciples of Jesus— one when many choose to walk away from Jesus. The reason they walk away is that the teaching that Jesus has just given is just too much for them. And what is this teaching?

Jesus has just spoken about the absolute necessity to eat and drink the body and blood of the Son of Man – a requirement that those who would find **life** would have to actually commune in the life of the Divine – to eat and drink the divine life. Way too much!

But what was it that these people who were following Jesus wanted?

maybe a new prayer to say?

maybe a simple pious practice they could adopt?

maybe visit the Temple 3 times a week?

maybe something like the traditions that they already knew – a tradition of rules, practices, prohibitions and promises. “A little more of what we already know would be just fine!”

No! Jesus said – you must eat and drink in the very life of God.

But what is this divine life?

The people knew the God that Jesus was talking about. Jesus was talking about the God whom Joshua describes in the first reading today – this is the God of the Exodus:

this is the God who was never put off by what seemed impossible

this is the God who looked at a group of slaves and saw priests, prophets and kings.

this is the God who didn't flinch before Pharaohs, armies, wide deserts and deep seas.

this is the God who was wildly innovative, creative and 'naively' unafraid!

this is the God who transformed this bunch of nobodies into a courageous body of innovators, creators and 'naive' visionaries.

This was the God Jesus commanded be consumed by his followers— to actually be in communion with this God of Exodus – to be liberated and so to liberate the world!

So...when I ponder these readings, I am even more angered by our church abuse crisis that never ends.

The anger is fueled, first and foremost, by the stories of survivors and the torturous trauma and the often-diabolic denials they endure.

But, what also angers me is the absolute unwillingness of the church leadership to change the system!

We who eat and drink the very presence of the God who found 'ways out of no ways' – we look at the system that so is so brutally broken and continue to say there is nothing we can do!

Well, I'm tired of it. Are you?

We don't need another apology.

We don't need another video or training session.

We don't even need a few surgical resignations of Bishops.

What we do need is a new system of leadership in the church!

Without this immediate dramatic change, then this is getting to be just like the abused wife who keeps going back to the abusive husband – of course always preceded by a sincere apology and a sincere promise for conversion by the abuser.

Well, we have seen it too many times and all of us at some point surely tell the woman to stop going back – until apologies are shown to produce concrete changes of behavior.

In my own mind, I have been thinking about what change might look like and how quickly much of it can happen.

You may not agree with what I am going to say – but I say it because I am a baptized member of this church and so, I, like you, have the right and obligation to speak.

My plan involves speaking to the Pope – we have a Pope – and one of the good things about this role of Pope is that change can actually happen quite quickly. We certainly know that concentrated power can, in many cases, obstruct change but, if used well, it can be transformative.

So, I want to put forth what I am calling the '**15-Minute Plan**' – because these three actions can be done within 15 minutes by the Pope. I will say – even if you don't agree with this plan – it is 100% orthodox and nothing is against the faith of the church. So, this is what I would ask the Pope to do with these 15 minutes-

The first 5 minutes – scribble on a note pad a couple sentences fully expanding ***the welcome of married men into the priesthood***. This is the easiest, as we already have many married priests in the church. This may actually might just take 3 minutes – it's so easy!

The second 5 minutes would be spent jotting out a second decree – ***women would immediately be admitted to the order of Deacon*** – this is completely possible and can be done without any challenge.

The final 5 minutes would be spent in alerting – through e-mail perhaps - theologians, biblical scholars and every member of the church that we are immediately ***re-opening the public conversation and discernment regarding the ordination of women to the priesthood.***

These three actions can be done in 15 minutes – I'd even give him 15 days! – But it can all be done now!

I'm not proposing this plan to say that married men are better than celibate men, nor that women are better than men. What this plan does demand is to immediately widen the pool of candidates for leadership for our parishes. This 'widening' -in and of itself -will eternally alter and dismantle the current unhealthy system and will address this man-made vocation crisis that we never stop hearing about:

'we have so few priests' goes the refrain defining the problem as one of unsolvable scarcity.

But the truth is we have plenty of priests if we change the way we think and act.

Will this **15 -Minute Plan** give us a perfect church? Of course not. But it might give us a healthier church leadership.

Unfortunately, now, and for too long in the past, - due to the 'scarcity theory'- we often ordain men with significant gaps in development and maturity – and we continue to give these men way too much power. We deserve the best leaders we can call to serve us. Remember leadership is all about service, and it is meant to serve, you, the People of God.

We have been told by so many 'guardians' of the system that this **15 Minute Plan** I laid out would cause too many difficulties - implying that somehow fear should control how we proceed. But I would ask,

"Whatever the difficulties that arise – and there will be many – as a result of this systemic change – Can it ever be anywhere as near as bad as what we are experiencing now?"

We are a nearly completely immobilized church unable to evangelize - left weeping and wailing with our victim brothers and sisters.

If the pain of the victims can do anything positive – it can become the energy that actually makes a healthier church possible for the children of the next generations!

Now we come to this table to once again eat and drink in the God of innovation, creativity and boldness – whose very life blood is creation and re-creation. This is the only thing that gives me hope – this food - and you, the People of God, who endure so much but continue to want to walk with Jesus. May we eat this body and drink this blood and be liberated so we might go out and liberate the church and the world.