



Walking After the Lord More Faithfully: Interview with Fr Joe Mattam, SJ

What do you say to the contemporary crises that the Indian Church face?

JM: In one way, what is happening now is something that has been happening all through the history of the Church. But in India, given our small, minority, unwanted group status, it is very unfortunate; we are giving a lot of fodder to our enemies. For ordinary Christians what is happening now can be very unsettling in their faith life.

But the fact that sisters did speak up – that is something positive; I know of many sisters who have been victims of the abuse by priests in all parts of the country. Often they are unable to do anything about such abuse; sometimes Bishops are also involved. Many live with a lot of guilt feeling.

Can you please give your comments on the sexual crisis in our Church?

JM: Concubinage among the clergy has been very rampant in the Church prior to the Reformation period; perhaps also other periods also. The call to a chaste life is a special vocation;; some priests are in it not because they are suited for it, but for many other reasons. For one thing, many priests do not pray at all. Theirs is a very mechanical life.

Their priestly training may have been also faulty. Hedonistic culture that is prevailing in the world today also affects the priests. Sometimes, sisters are not very definite about their “no” to such invitations. What is happening now is a call to the Church to shape up.

What are your suggestions to prevent such a situation?

JM: Pay more attention during formation; sisters should also be instructed to be more assertive about their wanting to be faithful to their call. Often they are ignorant about the behaviour of priests that end up in bed; if they have been better trained to detect the harmful behaviour of priests.

How can the Church make this an opportunity to grow?

JM: The CBCI and other bodies of bishops should take up this issue for their study; and issue statements for the benefit of the whole church. the CRI should also take up this issue for frank discussion and action.. There had been a Capuchin who is a famous counsellor who used to exploit women on a regular basis; only in a few cases did the pattern came to be known. in one case when I approached one of their superiors about it, he said they were aware of the problem; now I do not know how the situation is.

Given this situation, how can we make the Church credible in India today?

JM: Some official statements by the CBCI, CRI might help. I see what is happening now as an opportunity for the church to purify itself and come to walk after the Lord more faithfully. Now this cannot be ignored by anyone; so this may be seen as a blessing.

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