

# SUNDAY to SUNDAY

## SAINT OF THE WEEK



### FIDELIS OF SIGMARINGEN

1577–1622

Feast Day—April 24

Born in Sigmaringen, Germany, Mark Roy studied philosophy and law at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau. After tutoring young aristocrats and traveling Europe with them, he began practicing law in Alsace, where he quickly became “the poor person’s lawyer.” But, disillusioned over other lawyers’ behavior, he gave up the law to follow a vocation in religious life. As an ordained Capuchin friar named Fidelis, he was renowned for his holiness, preaching, and leadership. He was a superior at several houses before being commissioned to go to eastern Switzerland to call Protestant Calvinists back to Catholicism. This mission, complicated by the politics of the time and hatred against the Catholic Habsburgs, became increasingly dangerous and led to his murder by the sword of his opponents. He was canonized a martyr in 1746.



## SALT AND LIGHT

### PROTECTING CHILDREN: WARNING SIGNS OF POTENTIAL ABUSERS

by Drew Dillingham

Everyone knows the story of the prophet Jonah. He is commanded by God to prophesy to Nineveh, home of one of Israel’s greatest enemies. Despite receiving God’s commission to save 120,000 people from destruction, he instead chooses to flee on a ship, is thrown overboard by its sailors and ends up in the mouth of a great fish or whale.

Nevertheless, the threat of dying in the belly of a fish at the bottom of the sea changes Jonah’s mind, and after praying for God’s help, Jonah ends up on the shores of Nineveh anyway. God again commands Jonah to prophesy to the people and this time Jonah accepts. After only “a single day’s walk announcing, ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown,’ the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth” (Jonah 3:4-5). Thus, the entire city was saved from destruction.

To me, this story has two central themes. First, we must always be attentive to true warning signs and be willing to react to them. Though they were sinful, the people of Nineveh recognized the sign of God’s mercy and they repented, ultimately preventing the destruction of their city. Second, we cannot allow our fears to prevent us from doing what is right. Out of fear, Jonah tried to hide from his responsibilities. Thankfully God intervened, but if he had not, Jonah’s fear would have led to the destruction of the Ninevites.

These two themes are why this story came to my mind as we discussed in class, this week at the Gregorian, the potential warning signs and “grooming behaviors” of sexual offenders. Research shows there are certain behaviors, if exhibited by adults such as teachers, priests, coaches or relatives, that could be warning signs or grooming behaviors for potential child sexual abuse. Some of these behaviors include: taking personal vacations and trips with children; allowing children to often be in his/her personal living quarters; giving lavish gifts to children; violating physical boundaries with children; having countless photos of children; making sexually suggestive remarks to children; giving alcohol and/or drugs to minors; allowing children to break the rules.

In some cases, these warning signs are not reported due to fear, our own biases in favor of adults who we couldn’t imagine as offenders or because of the perceived problems reporting these behaviors would create for the Church, the offender, or ourselves. The person left out of the equation in these situations is the child who could be abused.

Today, if you noticed warning signs of abuse or grooming behaviors, how would you react? Overall, as a Church and as individuals, would we behave more like Jonah or the people of Nineveh? Does it take being swallowed by a whale to respond to God’s will, or despite being sinners, will we immediately recognize a devastating threat and take action in these situations before it is too late? If you notice these behaviors, it is important to keep your children away from those who exhibit them, report the individuals behaving inappropriately to your diocese, and if appropriate, to law enforcement as well. When it comes to warning signs, we must behave more like the Ninevites and less like Jonah in order to prevent abuse.

