

Pastor's Reflections: Our Faith in the Face of Scandal

These are difficult days to be Catholic. With devastating reports of abuse perpetrated by Archbishop McCarrick which were deepened by the Pennsylvania Grand Jury investigation, dark clouds engulf us. Anger. Grief. Shame. I have had many folks of goodwill wonder: how do we respond to such evil committed by those who were so trusted? Instinctually, I turn to the Gospel to see how Jesus acted in the face of such similar evils.

First, Christ responds to evil with anger. In contrast to the portrait of Jesus as a gentle pacifist, anger plays an important role in his ministry. In Luke, Jesus' four "beatitudes" are followed by four excoriating "woes" directed at injustice. Jesus' anger is not self-serving, but a righteousness aimed precisely at the spiritual leaders of his day who failed in their responsibility. In fact, his harshest words of invective are directed at those who were sources of scandal to the young: "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6). This anger is good, purifying and healthy. If the recent revelations of abuse anger you, you are in good company. The goal of such righteous anger is unselfish and purposeful towards effecting change. Just as Jesus made a whip of cords and drove out the greedy money changers, so too, our Lord would have us upend the tables of any abusive clerical culture and chase out all those who have defamed and betrayed the sacred trust of their priesthood.

Second, Christ always responds to victims with compassion. Jesus' ministry is always to those who need healing of mind, body and especially spirit. Those who have been abused need to experience the love Christ. As I was praying the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, I contemplated how Christ's agony in the garden included his awareness of how much evil would be inflicted on the innocent by those who are ordained to his service. As a Church, it is not enough for us to react defensively or to point quickly to the concrete steps that have been taken in recent decades to confront the crisis. Like Christ, we are called to accompany,

to listen and even to feel the weight of the rejection of those who have been wounded.

Third, Christ does not despair in the face of abandonment and betrayal. This is important because such crisis might cause us to be discouraged. Scandal has the power to lead us to despair. Over the course of the past week, I've been confronted with questions such as: How can I be Catholic in the face of such scandal? How do I talk to my family, friends and acquaintances who are disparaging the Church because of these evils? There is no doubt that this evil has direct victims, but it also has indirect ones by undercutting vocations, causing people to lose confidence in Christianity, and dramatically compromising attempts at evangelization. In such moments, I consider the earliest moments of crisis in the Church: Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, the apostles' cowardly abandonment of Jesus in the Garden. Yet God remains faithful to his promise to be with His Church. His promise to Peter that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail" is not qualified by Peter's holiness. The Psalms remind us "to place not your trust in princes," be they religious or otherwise. Our faith is not founded on the holiness of its clergy or leadership. Thank God. It is founded on the promise of Christ, the Head of the living community of believers. If the church is to be renewed, it will have to happen in the everyday lives of the faithful. Through the prayerful, sacrificial habits of daily life, we cultivate the spiritual disciplines necessary to endure this present darkness and to keep the light of faith burning brightly. The response to scandal is sanctity. More than ever we need saints!

Every Sunday we profess in the Creed: "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". To pronounce this Creed in the midst of crisis is the real test of faith. This is a call to renewal. We should ask ourselves personally: what do I really believe? Where do I hear the voice of the chief shepherd? It is part of the cross of the Christian life to live in an imperfect Church; this is how God made it. Suffering from these imperfections is how Jesus himself became the Chief Shepherd. This is why he can also still lead us through purification to glory and peace.

~ Fr Michael

President of U.S. Bishops' Conference Announces Effort That Will Involve Laity, Experts, and the Vatican as U.S. Bishops Resolve to Address “Moral Catastrophe”

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has issued the following statement after a series of meetings with members of the USCCB's Executive Committee and other bishops. The following statement includes three goals and three principles, along with initial steps of a plan that will involve laity, experts, and the Vatican. A more developed plan will be presented to the full body of bishops at their general assembly meeting in Baltimore in November. Cardinal DiNardo's full statement follows:

“Brothers and Sisters in Christ, two weeks ago, I shared with you my sadness, anger, and shame over the recent revelations concerning Archbishop Theodore McCarrick. Those sentiments continue and are deepened in light of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report. We are faced with a spiritual crisis that requires not only spiritual conversion, but practical changes to avoid repeating the sins and failures of the past that are so evident in the recent report. Earlier this week, the USCCB Executive Committee met again and established an outline of these necessary changes.

The Executive Committee has established three goals: (1) **an investigation into the questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick**; (2) **an opening of new and confidential channels for reporting complaints against bishops**; and (3) **advocacy for more effective resolution of future complaints**. These goals will be pursued according to three criteria: proper independence, sufficient authority, and substantial leadership by laity.

We have already begun to develop a concrete plan for accomplishing these goals, relying upon consultation with experts, laity, and clergy, as well as the Vatican. We will present this plan to the full body of bishops in our November meeting. In addition, I will travel to Rome to present these goals and criteria to the Holy See, and to urge further concrete steps based on them.

The overarching goal in all of this is stronger protections against predators in the Church and anyone who would conceal them, protections that will hold bishops to the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

Allow me to briefly elaborate on the goals and criteria that we have identified. The first goal is a full investigation of questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick. These answers are necessary to prevent a recurrence, and so help to protect minors, seminarians, and others who are vulnerable in the future. We will therefore invite the Vatican to conduct an Apostolic Visitation to address these questions, in concert with a group of predominantly lay people identified for their expertise by members of the National Review Board and empowered to act.

The second goal is to make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier. Our 2002 “Statement of Episcopal Commitment” does not make clear what avenue victims themselves should follow in reporting abuse or other sexual misconduct by bishops. We need to update this document. We also need to develop and widely promote reliable third-party reporting mechanisms. Such tools already exist in many dioceses and in the public sector and we are already examining specific options.

The third goal is to advocate for better procedures to resolve complaints against bishops. For example, the canonical procedures that follow a complaint will be studied with an eye toward concrete proposals to make them more prompt, fair, and transparent and to specify what constraints may be imposed on bishops at each stage of that process.

We will pursue these goals according to three criteria. The first criterion is genuine independence. Any mechanism for addressing any complaint against a bishop must be free from bias or undue influence by a bishop. Our structures must preclude bishops from deterring complaints against them, from hampering their investigation, or from skewing their resolution.

The second criterion relates to authority in the Church. Because only the Pope has authority to discipline or remove bishops, we will assure that our measures will both respect that authority and protect the vulnerable from the abuse of ecclesial power.

Our third criterion is substantial involvement of the laity. Lay people bring expertise in areas of investigation, law enforcement, psychology, and other relevant disciplines, and their presence reinforces our commitment to the first criterion of independence.

Finally, I apologize and humbly ask your forgiveness for what my brother bishops and I have done and failed to do. Whatever the details may turn out to be regarding Archbishop McCarrick or the many abuses in Pennsylvania (or anywhere else), we already know that one root cause is the failure of episcopal leadership. The result was that scores of beloved children of God were abandoned to face an abuse of power alone. This is a moral catastrophe. It is also part of this catastrophe that so many faithful priests who are pursuing holiness and serving with integrity are tainted by this failure.

We firmly resolve, with the help of God's grace, never to repeat it. I have no illusions about the degree to which trust in the bishops has been damaged by these past sins and failures. It will take work to rebuild that trust. What I have outlined here is only the beginning; other steps will follow. I will keep you informed of our progress toward these goals.

Let me ask you to hold us to all of these resolutions. Let me also ask you to pray for us, that we will take this time to reflect, repent, and recommit ourselves to holiness of life and to conform our lives even more to Christ, the Good Shepherd.”

~ August 16, 2018



Statement from the Western Dominican Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

We are angered and disgusted by recent reports out of Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, Chile, Australia, and other places regarding sexual abuse by clergy and members of religious orders and by the systematic cover-up of and participation in abuse by some of the highest-ranking members of the Church's leadership. These actions harmed innocent young people and betrayed the mission and person of Jesus Christ. We are shamed and saddened by the spiritual decay and moral rot that continues to be revealed in the Catholic Church.

We wish to stand as members of the Order of Preachers in solidarity with those who were abused. To the men and women who have been harmed, we offer you our support. We share in the frustration of the faithful who are shocked and enraged. The Grand Jury Report from Pennsylvania, covering the past 70 years, causes immense pain and a deep loss of trust.

At this time, it is necessary for us to renew our personal and provincial commitment to do all that we can to keep young people and all the vulnerable in our ministries safe now and into the future. We reaffirm our commitment to the protection of young people and the vulnerable, to creating safe environments where they are able to flourish as children of God and people of faith. We are particularly mindful of the anxiety and fear news of sexual abuse and cover-ups causes for many parents and guardians and want to assure them of our firm resolution to safeguard their children from all harm.

For many years it has been our policy to review all allegations against any friar and have them investigated by unbiased third-parties. Established claims result in a friar's permanent removal from public ministry and legal action.

In addition to this policy, we mandate child safety education, background checks, and reporting and external reviews of our child protection policies and practices. We will continue to collaborate with other organizations on implementation and improvement of the Charter for the Protection of Young People and to be vigilant in the screening and formation of applicants to our Province for the priesthood or brotherhood.

We recognize the need for all of us Dominicans to use the authority entrusted to us as preachers of the Gospel to overcome evil with good and to guarantee that all of God's people come to know the love and mercy of Jesus.