

Pastor's Greetings:

THOUGHTS ON CLERICAL REFORM

With the shock, outrage, scandal, and some nausea accompanying the recent information about the former cardinal, Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, and the new allegations of his sexual abuse of boys, I raise the question of the need for the reform of the Roman Catholic clergy. In the particular case of Archbishop McCarrick, Pope Francis has accepted his resignation from the cardinalate and ordered him to a secluded life of prayer and penance. Earlier he was removed from all public ministry as a priest and bishop. Rightly, bishops and others are loudly demanding a thorough investigation of how this man could have been doing as he is alleged to have done without numerous clergy and others colluding to hide his behavior from view and allowing it to continue. There appears to be no doubt that he grievously offended against chastity with adult seminarians and priests for years. It is said that in reference to this behavior many "in the know" referred to him as "Uncle Ted." By what collusive code was he protected as he rose to one of the highest ranks of power and privilege in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church?

In addition to McCarrick himself, who else needs to be held to account? If we should survey the whole Church hierarchy and bureaucracy with an unsparing lens, what similar corruption might come to light? One might hope and pray that the former cardinal is the rare exception to an otherwise virtuous clergy. But we have not examined our lives as a body as to the virtues to which we officially aspire nor do we have established regular processes of "fraternal correction" to watch over the actual status of lives, witness, and ministry. As men in Holy Orders we are far from having that "radical communitarian form" which Pope Saint John Paul II declared we should have. Besides that, we are still seeking to bring to light all of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons by representatives of the Church, and, while much progress has been made, we are sadly still an immeasurable distance from that achievement. Given all that heretofore hidden reality, it would be stupid of us and dishonest to presume that a similar universe of immorality might not exist in the clergy among adults with adults. While admittedly distinct, the two realms of sexual misconduct are morally and psychologically inseparable. Across the board, to be whole the Church is compelled both to address the possibility of immoral behaviors currently being hid, to redress



those discovered, and to act effectively to prevent their recurrence. This means the Church should undertake to reform the clergy and all those who act officially in its name. How might this be done, for it can only be achieved by way of radical conversion and authentic accountability?

As a cleric myself, a member of the target group to be examined and reformed as well as being one who seeks that reform, I can only offer a beginning reflection. I hope the undertaking of a reform might grow and matures as it goes. I may ask for it and recommend it to my bishop and presbyterate, but I have no authority to make it happen. To help the possibility I may even suggest some ideas to help it along. Those potentially harmed by hidden clerical misconduct and the damages done, especially to the integrity of the ministry and the credibility of our Gospel witness, can only be addressed by our more grievous sins coming to light and by repentance. How might we go about examining clerical life in the Church and how might we reform the fallenness we might possibly find?

Two things immediately come to mind. First, the Church can be guided by the very resolutions and promises made by those in Holy Orders in their respective ordination rites. Second, we can establish in canon law a principled, vigorous regime of internal fraternal correction and of outside accountability. I am a theologian by training, though, not a lawyer. The sacred commitments made by those in Holy Orders offer an excellent standard by which we should be able to hold each other to account. The stated resolutions and promises are meant to be permanent and cumulative from order to order. Are they adequate to all the characteristics needed of those in Holy Orders? Possibly not. We need to have regard to what is not said. They might well be strengthened or augmented with regard to property, life-style, and the use of power and authority. What follows here is slightly adapted from the Rite of Holy Orders in current usage.

At my ordination in 1977 as a transitional deacon (an unmarried man to be called later to the presbyteral order) I resolved: *To be consecrated for the Church's ministry by the laying on of [the bishop's] hands and the gift of the Holy Spirit; to discharge the office of deacon with humble charity in order to assist the priestly Order and to benefit the Christian people; to hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience, as the Apostle urges, and to proclaim this faith in word and deed according to the Gospel and the Church's tradition; to embrace and to keep forever the commitment to the celibate state as a sign of [my] dedication to Christ the Lord for*

the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, in the service of God and Man; to maintain and deepen the spirit of prayer that is proper to [this] way of life and, in keeping with this spirit and what is required of [me], to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the People of God and indeed for the whole world; and to conform [my] way of life always to the example of Christ, of whose Body and Blood [I] minister at the altar; AND I promised respect and obedience to my Ordinary and his successors. Regarding celibate chastity I knew then and now that Canon Law further specified the chastity to which I was called to be one of “perfect continence” for the Lord. Forty-one years later I can see how my promises and resolutions have matured and deepened with God’s grace, mercy, and daily renewal. Am I prepared to be examined in some effective way as to my faithfulness to the commitments I made at my ordination as a deacon? By the grace and mercy of God, while I must admit of imperfection, I hope to be found not to have seriously failed my trust. And, I do believe that reform of the clergy should include a regular visitation of these diaconal promises with some explicit form of accountability.

At my ordination in 1978 as a presbyter, building on the diaconal commitments, I resolved: *With the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral rank, as a worthy fellow worker with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord’s flock; to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith; to celebrate faithfully and reverently, in accord with the Church’s tradition, the mysteries of Christ, especially the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Christian people; to implore (with the Order of Bishops) God’s mercy upon the people entrusted to [my] care by observing the command to pray without ceasing; to be united more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a pure sacrifice, and with Christ to consecrate [myself] to God for the salvation of all; AND I promised respect and obedience to [my] Ordinary and his successors.* Again I say, forty years later I can see how these priestly promises and resolutions have matured and deepened with God’s grace, mercy, and daily renewal. Based on my experience I hold that reform of the clergy should include a regular visitation of these presbyteral promises with some explicit form of accountability. Once, years ago while I was directing the diocesan office for the ongoing formation of clergy, we structured an opportunity for priests at our

annual convocation to renew our promises and resolutions to then Bishop John McRaith. It occurred at our closing liturgy and was optional. Those who participated knelt before the bishop with our hands folded within his and we repeated what we had vowed at our ordination. I personally found the experience deeply moving and memorable. The nearest the Church comes to any re-affirmation of our promises is at the annual Chrism Mass. This annual event is very important to me, but it is not accompanied by any preparatory examination or by any consequential accountability. If it were effective and so accompanied, could the hidden crimes of clerical abuse and the betrayals of our witness have escaped correction.

Consider also the promises and resolutions made for the episcopal order. At his ordination the priest to be consecrated bishop builds upon the commitments he made as a deacon and as a priest. These serve as the continuing bedrock of his new responsibilities. With that in mind the candidate for bishop resolves: *By the grace of the Holy Spirit to discharge until death the office entrusted to [the Order of Bishops] by the Apostles, which is passed on to him by the laying on of hands; to preach the Gospel of Christ with constancy and fidelity; to guard the deposit of faith, entire and incorrupt, as handed down by the Apostles preserved in the Church everywhere and at all times; to build up the body of Christ, his Church, and to remain in the unity of that body together with the Order of Bishops under the authority of the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle; to render obedience faithfully to the successor of the blessed Apostle Peter; to guide the holy people of God in the way of salvation as a devoted father and sustain them with the help of his fellow ministers, the priests and deacons; for the sake of the Lord’s name, to be welcoming and merciful to the poor, to strangers, and to all who are in need; as a good shepherd to seek out the sheep who stray and gather them into the Lord’s fold; and to pray without ceasing to almighty God for the holy people and to carry out the office of high priest without reproach.* Only the Pope can establish a way for bishops to review and to reaffirm these resolutions and promises. Current events alone offer ample evidence of the need to do so. To have a reform of the clergy at the episcopal level, such an examined review of ministry and structured accountability would be essential. At least it seems so to me.

Among the clergy fraternal correction and accountability is sometimes named as a value, but we have very poor to non-existent experience of it. Deacons and priests look to the office of the Bishop to

provide the leadership for our accountability. Priests and deacons themselves do not have the canonical authority to police our own, only the episcopacy has this authority. The episcopacy seems not to have the canonical authority to police its own. Only the papacy has such authority. Today we appear to be structured against self-correction. The chastisement of public exposure and the scourge of history are not particularly kind to the Church when members of its hierarchy grievously fail God's people and the Gospel. With humility and truth the exposure should be brought about by the shepherds themselves fully cooperating with the Lay Faithful. We are tasked by Vatican II and by history thoroughly to examine and to reform the clergy, the hierarchy, the church bureaucracy, and ministry. The call is loud and clear. At least it seems so to me. I pray that, if it be God's will, the Holy Spirit will provide the means.

Fr. Richard, August 12, 2018.

Mike Bogdan, Director of Music for the Diocese of Owensboro, shared with us a prayer that appeared in last weekend's Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions newsletter.

Heavenly Father, In every age, you have been our refuge. Yet again and still, we stand before you asking for your protection on your holy Church.

- For the victims of abuse and their families, pour out your healing and your peace.
- For the Bishops of this country, continue to inspire their decisions, and guide them with your Spirit.
- For the thousands of good and faithful priests, who have followed your call to serve you and your people in holiness, sustain them by your grace.
- For the faithful who are angry, confused, and searching for answers, embrace them with your love, restore their trust, console them with your clear Gospel message, and renew them with your sacraments.

We place our Church in your hands, for without you we can do nothing. May Jesus, our High Priest and true compass, continue to lead her in every thought and action – to be an instrument of justice, a source of consolation, a sacrament of unity, and a manifestation of your faithful covenant.

Grant this through that same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Bishop Larry Persico from the Diocese of Erie Pennsylvania said the following.

I invite the faithful to join me in turning to God in this moment of darkness. Prayer must be one aspect of our response to the grand jury report. Therefore, I have asked all of our pastors to open the doors of their churches from 7 am to 7 pm on Saturday, September 15—the feast of Our Mother of Sorrows. I invite all people to make time on that day to visit a church. Out of respect for each individual, I simply ask that you spend some quiet time there in prayer. You may want to pray for victims. You may be a victim yourself and wish to use the time to pray for healing. You may want to pray that the leaders of the church renew their commitment to Christian discipleship, providing strong moral leadership. You may want to pray for the grace and faith you need in your own life at this time. However you are inspired by the Holy Spirit, I invite you to come and pray.



Prayer to our Mother of Sorrows

Our mother of sorrows,
with strength from above you stood by the cross,
sharing in the sufferings of Jesus,
and with tender care you bore Him in your arms,
mourning and weeping.

We praise you for your faith,
which accepted the life God planned for you.
We praise you for your hope,
which trusted that God would do great things in you.
We praise you for your love in bearing with Jesus
the sorrows of His passion.

Holy Mary,
may we follow your example,
and stand by all your children
who need comfort and love.

Mother of God,
stand by us in our trials
and care for us in our many needs.
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.
Amen!

PRESIDENT OF U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS RENEWS COMMITMENT FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN DISCIPLINING BISHOPS

August 27, 2018

WASHINGTON— Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops** (USCCB) has issued the following statement.

Cardinal DiNardo's full statement follows:

"In communion with the Holy Father, I join the Executive Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in taking upon ourselves his exhortation, 'this open wound [of abuse] challenges us to be firm and decisive in the pursuit of truth and justice.'

"On August 1st, I promised that USCCB would exercise the full extent of its authority, and would advocate before those with greater authority, to pursue the many questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick. On August 16th, I called for an Apostolic Visitation, working in concert with a national lay commission granted independent authority, to seek the truth. Yesterday, I convened our Executive Committee once again, and it reaffirmed the call for a prompt and thorough examination into how the grave moral failings of a brother bishop could have been tolerated for so long and proven no impediment to his advancement.

"The recent letter of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò brings particular focus and urgency to this examination. The questions raised deserve answers that are conclusive and based on evidence. Without those answers, innocent men may be tainted by false accusation and the guilty may be left to repeat sins of the past.

"I am eager for an audience with the Holy Father to earn his support for our plan of action. That plan includes more detailed proposals to: seek out these answers, make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier, and improve procedures for resolving complaints against bishops. Inspired by his recent letter to the people of God, and his *motu proprio* of two years ago, *As a Loving Mother*, I am confident Pope Francis shares our desire for greater

effectiveness and transparency in the matter of disciplining bishops. We renew our fraternal affection for the Holy Father in these difficult days.

"To the survivors of abuse and the families who have lost a loved one to abuse, I am sorry. You are no longer alone. Since 2002, hundreds of professionally trained staff across the country have been working with the Church to support survivors and prevent future abuse. Nationwide, the Church has a zero-tolerance policy toward priests and deacons who abuse, safe environment training, background checks for those working around children, victim assistance coordinators, prompt reporting to civil authorities, and lay review boards in dioceses.

"In other ways, we have failed you. This is especially true for adults being sexually harassed by those in positions of power, and for any abuse or harassment perpetrated by a bishop. We will do better. The more she is buffeted by storms, the more I am reminded that the Church's firm foundation is Jesus Christ. The failures of men cannot diminish the light of the Gospel. Lord, by the help of your mercy, show us the way to salvation."

PRAYER TO SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our defense against the
wickedness and snares of
the Devil.
May God rebuke him, we
humbly pray,
and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly
hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits,
who prowl about the world
seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.

