

St.. Edward, St. George, St. Paul, St. Peter Parishes

August 18, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In light of the recent happenings that plague the Church today – the sexual abuse scandal – a difficult topic indeed, one that not everyone will want to read about, I wish to share with you excerpts from the letters of Cardinal DiNardo, President of the USCCB, and Fr. Gary Zender, the Vicar for Clergy of our Archdiocese. Their words and thoughts were helpful to me.

Cardinal DiNardo writes: “I share 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.”

Fr. Gary writes: “What are we to make of such an unthinkable reality in our Church?”

First, nothing can ever excuse sexual abuse of any kind, especially against minors, and most especially by the persons the Church places in authority over others. People trust the Church and its ordained ministers with their innermost selves, and with their children. As a priest myself, I know how precious, how holy, that trust is. The breach of trust when a priest abuses is shocking, horrifying, the worst of sins.

We need to empower victims to speak up. Talking about the issue with children and young people, using age-appropriate language (“good touch” vs. “bad touch”), helps to give a voice to those who might otherwise not even have the words to speak about what they have experienced. In the McCarrick case, it was a confessor who encouraged a penitent to speak up. Silence only perpetuates the abuse.

We know that Cardinal McCarrick did much good as priest, bishop and cardinal, which makes the actions he’s accused of even more tragic. One woman said that she was impressed with his pastoral skill as she watched him listen humbly and patiently to a person who went on and on about an issue. When we see someone doing so much good, it’s natural to believe he couldn’t be capable of also doing evil – in fact we often don’t even want to hear about it. People struggle to put together the good that they see in a person with the bad they might have experienced or been told about, and so may question themselves or others – “could that really have happened?” We don’t want to believe it. But we need to

hear, believe and take action when a victim does speak up, or we help to perpetuate the evil.

We need to understand that dealing with the issue of sexual abuse, whether in the Church or in society, is far from over. Our parish, along with the whole Seattle Archdiocese, requires background checks and ongoing "Safe Environment" training for all the ordained, every employee of the Archdiocese, and every volunteer who works with children, youth or vulnerable adults. The training teaches what to watch for in order to prevent situations of abuse. This is good and necessary, but it doesn't mean we're finished with the problem. Rather, we all need to be constantly vigilant to stop abuse from happening.

The Church is both sinful and holy. We often say that the Church is the body of Christ. Jesus is the head of that body; he alone is holy, and is the reason we can claim that the Church is holy. But all of us, the members of his body, are sinful; so yes, the Church is also sinful. In response to the news about Cardinal McCarrick, writer Simcha Fischer said Jesus already knew all the depraved things human beings had done and would ever do, and he wept and bled and died for us any- way. She said, "It is a rotten Church. But it is not rotten to the heart, because Jesus is the heart." (America The Jesuit Review, an online service, August 1, 2018)"

Cardinal DiNardo concludes his letter: "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.

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."

Thank you for your prayers.

Fr. Felino S. Paulino
Pastor