



November 15, 2018

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

The past five months the American Church has been plagued with numerous scandals involving clerical sexual abuse and related cover-ups. And just when it seems that there might be a lull, another scandal hits the news and once again the Church is reeling from reports of a lack of behavioral oversight and denials by so many who should have known and reported cases of abuse. The President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), along with a contingent of USCCB leadership, met with Pope Francis in September to request an apostolic visitation into the behavior of former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and those who may have been aware of it even as McCarrick continued to rise in the hierarchy. That request was denied.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops met this week with the intention of voting on two proposals which they intended to present to Pope Francis, one regarding a code of conduct for bishops, and another for implementation of lay oversight boards to help with governance of the bishops. At the last moment, Cardinal Marc Ouellet of the Congregation of Bishops instructed the USCCB to delay the vote pending a meeting of all presidents of Bishops' Conferences around the world, which will take place this February. The bishops were not notified of this until Monday morning as they began their semi-annual meeting in Baltimore. Needless to say, this created emotions of anger, resentment, feelings of neglect – as if the Holy Father does not care - and a myriad of others. While I am not going to try to defend or interpret Pope Francis' actions, I would like to share a few pastoral insights.

First, in the world today we are accustomed to instant everything, from popcorn to news, texting, social media, information and so on. That is not how the Church has historically worked. While it may look like inactivity on the part of Pope Francis and the Vatican, the world in which they live thinks in terms of years and centuries, even as the faithful think in generations – their children and their grandchildren. This does not excuse what may be perceived as a slow response, but rather the Holy Father trying to see the whole picture for the universal Church. Indeed, I found myself angry, upset and disillusioned with a man whom I deeply respect. However, our faith tells us that in the chair of St. Peter, the Holy Father, even if he makes mistakes, is guided by the Holy Spirit in his governance of the Church.

Second, even though horrific crimes and terrible sins have been committed, we must not lose sight that every person, no matter what their state of life, is to be afforded due process and, for their own sakes, our prayers for their Christian conversion and repentance. We should and will demand justice, but we also respect each accused individual's due process. As I have said from the pulpit many times, I am a sinner and not worthy to confect the Eucharist at Mass. On the local front, Archbishop Gregory recently released the names of all clerics who have had credible allegations made against them since our inception as a diocese along with their current clerical



status. I applaud his transparency to the people of this Archdiocese. No one who has been credibly accused was permitted to remain in ministry, and some were laicized.

Third, I believe, even though it may appear painfully slow, that the final resolution to sanctify the Church will be much stronger and more effective if we engage the entire universal Church and allow a voice of unity to come together. We need look no further than dueling letters between the former nuncio to the United States and the Prefect for the Congregation of Bishops to see the need for ecclesial unity. We need to pray with Pope Francis for all the bishops who will meet next February to discuss clerical sexual abuse and the larger cultural issues that have allowed it not only to happen, but in some cases to be ignored or even concealed.

Finally, I have hope that in the long run this may help bring our local congregations closer together – as we see ourselves as local family first and then as part of the worldwide Church. In other words, the cleansing must come from the bottom up, rather than top down. I realize at the present time our bishops have lost their moral credibility, and that is a shame, because I believe that most of them are faithful stewards of the Gospel. Pray for our bishops and priests every day that they may be faithful stewards of their offices. May we continue to pray for good holy and faithful priests and bishops, and in that way, as we add to our numbers, we will see the credibility of the Church and her leaders slowly regained. Yes, it will be slow, but through humility, hard work and the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, we will once again be a beacon of light to the world.

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Mark  
Administrator