

August 21, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

The recent news events about Archbishop McCarrick as well as a report from Pennsylvania this past week detailing evils and crimes of bishops and priests perpetrated and hidden within our Church have been sobering and disheartening. Among the many articles and commentaries over the past weeks, there was one which mentioned allegations against a former bishop of our diocese, Raymond Boland, from the time he would have been a priest in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. Our diocese has no record of any allegations against Bishop Boland during the time he served as our bishop. After inquiries with the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Birmingham, where he served as a priest and bishop prior to coming here, neither of these dioceses had any record or information substantiating allegations.

Although there was no record of substantiating allegations, there was information for pause and further consideration. I feel it is my responsibility as your bishop to do the best I can to uncover the truth. In fairness to anyone who may have been harmed and the reputation of the late Bishop Boland, these inquiries must continue. If you have any information in this search for truth, please contact the Ombudsman, Jenifer Valenti (816-812-2500 or jenifervalenti@att.net).

Lamentably, in our own diocese there are victims who still bear the scars of abuse. In response, our local Church has taken actions to renew our efforts to reach out to those who have been harmed by sexual abuse for healing, and to protect our children and all in the Church. I am grateful for these actions, especially the work of the Office of Child and Youth Protection, the Ombudsman and the Independent Review Board. I am encouraged by the recently proposed goals of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that we will take up at our November meeting: a deeper investigation of the McCarrick scandal; establishment of channels for communicating complaints about bishops; more effective resolution of future complaints. I think the reforms made since 2002 have led to healing for many survivors, sanctions for offenders, and better protection for the vulnerable. Even so, we must undertake added reforms that will better protect the vulnerable and hold church leadership more fully accountable.

These steps have made an important impact for the good, but more is needed in this moment: a spiritual response.

As a priest and bishop, I acknowledge that the primary cause of this scandal rests with us in leadership and that the anger of many of the faithful is altogether justified. I also realize that some may be tempted to despair, especially victims and their families. So, my brother bishops and I must take the lead in doing penance for the sins and crimes of our colleagues. I invite my brother priests and all God's faithful people to join me in this endeavor, because I need your help. Together, we can recover and renew the hope of the Gospel which casts out the demon of despair.

This is the time to turn more intently to Jesus and beg for His help, much as the apostles did during the storm on the sea: "Lord, save us! We are lost!" (Mt 8:25). It is a time for us to remember with faith that He is stronger than all evil and sin, and that He is the Head of that body which is the Church. It is also a moment when we must realize the Lord desires that we unite ourselves to Him in acts of reparation and prayer in the face of these evils: for a deep healing for those who have been abused, for those who have left the Church due to these scandals, and to beg for mercy for all the sins committed.

To this end, I ask all our parishes to offer a special Mass, *For the Forgiveness of Sins*. This Mass can be offered at a special time or in place of a regularly scheduled parish Mass. I grant my permission to pastors who wish to offer this Mass on a Sunday of Ordinary Time between now and September 14. Likewise, I urge all to some form of penance, such as fasting, and to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Holy Rosary, or another prayer of your choosing daily until September 14th, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This is ultimately also a spiritual crisis which must be met with a spiritual response, one in which every member of the Body of Christ is needed.

I am sorry for this betrayal and the shame this brings on the Family of God. It is a time of grief. Nonetheless, I trust that our Savior shall deliver us from this peril by bringing healing and mercy, renewal and peace to our Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.
Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph