

A time to repent

The ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Church has hit us with full force following the revelations concerning Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, former archbishop of Washington, and the Pennsylvania grand jury report. Once again, we were confronted with a tsunami of evil: the evil of those who perpetrated unspeakable crimes against children and young people; and the complicity of church leaders, especially bishops, who failed to address this evil thoroughly and forthrightly so as to protect God's children.

On the weekend of Aug. 18-19, in parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore, your priests stood before you and addressed this crisis, as did I at a morning Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. I read and listened to what many of my brother priests said and I wish to thank them publicly. They found themselves once again addressing a situation which was not of their making. They did so out of love for the Lord, for the Church and for you, his people. I also know this places a still-greater burden on the many good priests who seek to engage in their ministries with integrity, generosity and joy. In this difficult time, they appreciate – more than you know – your support and prayers.

Over these past days, many people asked me, “What can we do?” Their question reflects a mix of emotions – ranging from skepticism, anger, pain and frustration to a heartfelt concern for victims and a desire to bring about healing and reform throughout the whole Church. But where should we start?

Let us begin with the Lord's first words to us: “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). For the crisis that has beset us is not a mere crisis of policies, procedures and public relations but rather an ungodly toleration of evil in our midst. So, the first place to begin is repentance, especially on the part of us bishops. By the word “repentance” I mean more than saying we're sorry. It means fasting and prayer, so that the gravity of what happened might sink more deeply into depth of our souls. It means opening our hearts to God's mercy, a mercy that should prompt us to go forward with humility, candor and love.

Even in repenting, we need your help. If this wound in the heart of the Church is

ever to be healed, we all need to ask God's help and seek his mercy. For that reason, I set aside Friday, Sept. 7, 2018, as a Day of Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I asked my brother priests to encourage you to take part in the Masses offered in parishes throughout the Archdiocese. For it is in the wounded heart of Jesus that we find the source of healing and renewed strength. Coupled with prayer, I would invite those who are able and willing to spend the day in fasting and prayer. In this way we join in seeking the grace of healing for victims of sexual abuse and reconciliation for those who have been scandalized, alienated and disillusioned.

Prayer and fasting alone will not lead the Church and her people out of this crisis. There is much work to be done. Suggestions have come from many quarters on how best to move forward, including those proposed by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (see page 14). But any reforms that truly accord with God's holy will for his Church begin with repentance and are sustained by God's grace.

May God bless you and keep you always in his love!