

Archbishop Lori's Remarks: Archdiocesan Pastoral Staff Day

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Opening Remarks

St. Joseph Parish, Eldersburg

Sept. 5, 2019

Introduction: A Word of Thanks

Good morning! It is good to be together and I am grateful for your presence here today. As always, a warm word of thanks to Father Neville and his staff here at St. Joseph's for welcoming us so warmly - thank you, Father Neville! And my thanks as well to John Romanowsky and his colleagues in the Department of Evangelization for all you have done to put this day together, in collaboration with your fellow co-workers in the vineyard, with all of you who are lay ecclesial ministers and with religious women and men, and with my fellow priests and deacons.

And it is to you that I wish to express my warmest thanks. It would be a mistake for anyone to think of any of you as merely holding down a job. Your various ministries - evangelization, catechesis, RCIA, sacramental preparation, youth and young adult ministry, the protection of children and young people, ministries to the sick and dying, ministries of charity and social justice, administration... the list is nearly endless even as your service to the Church is nearly endless. No, it is not a job that you do but a vocation that you live. One of the main things I want to do today is to thank you most sincerely, and in thanking you, to offer a word of encouragement.

The Situation Today

Last year when we gathered together for this professional day, we were feeling the full brunt of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report and the reports about former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. We felt, and rightly so, that we were in the grip of a crisis, not a new crisis but an old one newly reiterated, like a recurring nightmare that just gets worse and worse. We were facing the raw anger of our people who

rightly asked, “How could this be?” And you yourselves, who minister in the Church, were also disappointed and angry, but in your kindness you shared with me and with my fellow bishops the many questions welling up in your mind and heart.

A year has come and gone, and what has changed? To be sure, the measures of accountability for bishops were put in place, locally, here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and after fits and starts, they are being put in place throughout the Church in the United States. But no one thinks that such measures, important as they are, will adequately address the pain, suffering, and scandal that has been caused by some bishops and clergy who abused young people or were negligent in their duty to protect the young. You know as well as I, that, as diligent as we may be in addressing this locally, we have a long way to go in regaining the trust of survivors and in restoring trust among the people we are privileged to serve.

So, to reiterate the question, where do we now stand? It seems to me that the sharp-edged anger of a year ago has given way to a dull persistent pain, something like a toothache, that keeps flaring up. In the media there is a constant stream of stories about sexual abuse, much of it focusing on the malfeasance of bishops, and there is no lack of commentary from all points of the spectrum. And so, there is never a day when I don’t think about the crisis and I’m going to wager there is never a day when you don’t think of it either.

All this can be pretty discouraging and in fact produce in us reactions that we would never have imagined we’d experience when, with high idealism, we began our service to the Church. These include cynicism, defeatism, and apathy. On a purely human plane these reactions are natural but they also sap our vitality and vitality of the Church’s mission. And with but a moment’s prayerful reflection, you and I also realize that cynicism, defeatism, and apathy are not gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are the bitter fruits of evil and of the Evil One and must be resisted.

The Encouragement We Owe One Another in Christ A. I say all of the foregoing, not to take you again over the rough road over which we have travelled in the year just past, but rather to get to the true nature of the encouragement that we owe one another in Christ Jesus. On my part it cannot merely be a yearly verbal pat on the back – “Keep up the good work and I’ll see you next year!” Nor is it responsible for

me to hold out mere optimism - "It's not as bad as it seems. This will be over soon. They'll be back!" Mere optimism on my part misses the mark, on my part and on yours as well.

The real encouragement we owe to one another is summed up by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans Chapter 5, which I'd like to quote: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access to the grace in which we now stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:1-5). The encouragement we owe one another in Christ is neither gallows humor nor false optimism but genuine Christian hope arising from an enduring faith sustained by the love of the Holy Spirit. This is the basis for our ministries in the first place. In times like these we must rediscover and share with one another the firm basis upon which we stand - not a foundation of our own making - but the firm foundation of Christ who is the rock of our salvation.

This is not to theologize our troubles away but to recover the only solid basis upon which we will address them and at the same time reinvigorate the mission of the Church. You've noticed, no doubt, Pope Francis uses the word "joy" a lot - for example, "The Joy of the Gospel", "The Joy of Love"... As we absorb his wisdom, we come to understand that Gospel joy is founded on our encounter with one another in Christ Jesus, that Gospel joy is more durable than worldly joy and that Gospel joy is always purified by trials, everyday trials. We may not always feel joyful but there must be deep down, in each of us, a joy and a peace that the world can neither give nor take away from us. Our enduring joy, in good times and in bad, comes from the Risen Lord whose life and love are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit. That is the kind of joy that gives us encouragement and hope and that is the kind of joy we must manifest in the difficult work of re-evangelizing.

And it is this word of encouragement I want to share with you, not only to today but always, a joy I pray we can share with each other. I know that such joy lives in you and among you, that in fact you do share it with one another, so this morning I not

only thank you for what you do but for who you are, women and men of genuine Christian hope and joy, a hope and joy that shines forth even in the darkness. May God bless you and keep you always in his love!