

In homilies and messages, local clergy respond to abuse crisis

Parish priests and deacons throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore used their Aug. 18-19 homilies, along with messages on social media, bulletins and letters, to address their flocks in response to the recent findings of the Pennsylvania grand jury report concerning clergy child sexual abuse and the way bishops handled abusers.

Below are some excerpts:

Monsignor Richard B. Hilgartner - St. Joseph, Cockeysville

"I have given my life in service to the church, and at times today it pains me to see others violate the trust bestowed on them as leaders. At my ordination, I promised respect and obedience to my archbishop and his successors, that was Cardinal Keeler.

"I must say I'm finding the respect part challenging in a collective kind of way, with all due respect to my current archbishop, Archbishop Lori, and I can only say in my own prayer I'm finding that obedience for me comes as a promise not to an individual or to an institution, but as a sacrifice of my own will to Jesus himself. I promise obedience to the Lord so as to allow him to be truly the Lord of my life. I'm trying for myself to see that distinction but in my own prayer and in my own living this week, that hasn't been easy.

"It is difficult for me to hear how the news paints this story with such broad brush strokes. Not every priest, religious or church employee has committed such grave and heinous acts. It's actually a very small percentage - a smaller percentage than the general population. But any act is too much. Not every bishop was so negligent, but it is a tragedy that so many were.

"And what happened decades ago - this is a real important point for us today - what happened decades ago, tragic as it was, does not necessarily reflect the current state of affairs. Conversion comes about slowly and it's been a long process."

*Listen to Monsignor Hilgartner's full after-Communion comments **here**.*

Father James D. Proffitt - St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park

"If Satan wants to destroy the church, there's no more effective plan than to do it from the inside out. If we don't treat the cancer (and) remove it, that healing, that restoration, that reparation will never be complete...

"... if we (priests and bishops) can't get it back into our consciousness that we're servants, we should step aside.

"If we don't address these issues with more than words, it's like we're going to keep running into the same walls and embracing the same delusions and encouraging the same bad attitudes and practices.

"When we as a church are insular and worried about our own preservation, that is poison, that is cancer and that's what allowed that to go on through a couple of generations that we're aware of and it's got to stop now."

*Listen to Father Proffitt's full homily **here**.*

Father Gregory Rapisarda - Our Lady of Hope, Dundalk/St. Luke, Edgemere

"As with all things in life, God can create good from even the worst possible situation. Maybe it's time for that to happen in the church.

"We do know that as prodigal sons and daughters, God will never refuse a plea for forgiveness that is heartfelt and sincere. Repentance is important not only for us, but for our children and our grandchildren.

"We have obligation to teach our children and grandchildren. We may not always be able to defend the priests and the bishops, but we can defend church teaching, especially the Eucharist, which we celebrate today, and which we hear in the Gospel.

“We can think of St. Francis of Assisi, when God told him – ‘Go. Rebuild my church.’ He was not a priest. He was not a Franciscan. He spoke out. St. Catherine of Siena in the 14th century wrote to the pope and said to clean up the church. Good came out of evil.”

Father Martin Nocchi - St. Pius X, Rodgers Forge, and St. Mary of the Assumption, Govans

“The real power is with you. It’s with you. What do the Pharisees as well as any institution or political system want you to believe? That you’re powerless. You’re not.

“You have the power to force institutions to change, including this one. You have the power to push institutions to move beyond denial, beyond thoughts and prayers.

“If you’re here today you already know where and who the foundation is, the one who continues to feed us with life-giving bread rather than stones of shame and guilt. It’s all of you that need to push us forward.

“And so, we pray for God’s grace this day for more than thoughts and prayers. We pray for God’s grace to return to the foundation that, never, no never, forsakes, as the hymn goes. We pray for this Church and all of us to return to the heart of Jesus in these moments.”

*Read Father Nocchi’s full homily **here**.*

Deacon George Russell - St. Mary, Annapolis

“I say to you that God becomes man in the person of Jesus in order to show us the way to true goodness and true beauty. This morning, he tells us that ‘I am the bread of life,’ ‘I am the true food.’

“And in bringing these words to the fore, I do not mean to be speaking empty platitudes. No, I mean to say that in the days ahead, there will be many charges and countercharges, demonstrations and demands, panels and petitions about what has

come to pass, but all of that will be nothing but empty noise and will come to nothing if Jesus is not in the discussion. When Jesus declares that “I am the true food,” he means that when we are hungry and betrayed and broken and on the brink of despair, as so many are today; when death is looming large on our horizons: He, Jesus, is the answer.”

Father James Boric - Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Baltimore

“Priests who stay focused on the Eucharist remain holy. Priests who pray every single day an hour in front of the Eucharist, celebrate Mass devoutly - not only are they good priests, holy priests, but they stay priests.

“Why? Because they too are being filled inundated with a love which is well beyond them.”

Listen to Father Boric's full homily here.

Father Raymond L. Harris - Holy Family, Randallstown

“The Lord Jesus needs us to renew his church. I have never committed any of the crimes revealed in these scandals. However, I have sinned and Jesus has not left me. I am not perfect.

“As I cooperate with God's life and love dwelling within me, with the support of fellow disciples, I am being perfected. God is doing the same in you.

“There are issues that must be urgently addressed to repair these scandals. However, these scandals cannot be used as a pretext to disregard dogmas and doctrines. We are suffering from these scandals because these teachings were not followed.

“Jesus teaches that we confront the practice of hypocrisy by pursuing holiness (Mt 23:1-3). In Church history, the exposure of corruption among some of its members usually resulted in a renewal of holiness among many of its members.

“This is our challenge today. Consider the efforts to provide a safe environment for children and youth, to hold people accountable, and to promote healing and justice for survivors of abuse, to be part of this renewal of holiness.

“The Lord Jesus needs us to renew his church.”

*View Father Harris’ full Facebook post **here**.*

Father Mark Bialek - St. John, Westminster

“We are absolutely committed to the safety and well-being of our children, and we must also recognize the need for prayer, fasting and reparation. We must seek Divine assistance in rebuilding the Church. We humbly ask that you and your families join us in combatting this evil:

- “Beginning this weekend, the Saint Michael prayer will be prayed at all weekend and daily Masses.
- “Prayers for the healing of all those who are suffering will be added to our general intercessions.
- “On Friday, Sept. 7, and Saturday, Sept. 8, we will bring our eucharistic Lord in procession to every building of our campus and every classroom of our school to ask His blessing upon all our children, faculty, staff, catechists, youth ministers and volunteers.
- “We will celebrate a 40-hour devotion for purification and healing, beginning with the 6 p.m. Mass on Sunday, Sept. 16, and continuing until Tuesday, Sept. 18, at 7p.m., when a special Mass will be offered for those suffering from the clergy sex abuse scandal and for the healing of our Church.”

*Read Father Bialek’s full letter **here**.*

Father Michael White - Church of the Nativity, Timonium

“Both the enormity and the depravity of the revelations (of the grand jury) provoke an array of responses, so many in fact, that to choose any one would seem to

diminish my real reaction. Above everything I find myself appalled and angry.

"I am appalled and angered that at least some church hierarchy, over an extended period of time, valued the institution of the church over the safety and protection of children.

"I am appalled and angered that the criminal acts and irresponsible practices of so many priests and bishops led to the abuse of so many children.

"I am appalled and angered that these revelations will damage and perhaps even destroy some people's commitment to the church and their faith in Christ.

"I am appalled and angered that, as a result, some, perhaps many who desperately need Christ in their lives will now not know him.

"You may be appalled and angry too. You may be so angry that you are contemplating walking away from the church. I get that. I do. And I pray you don't.

"Beginning in September, we will offer eucharistic adoration every Saturday, to invoke God's mercy in the face of this catastrophe. To launch this new practice we will set aside the entire weekend of Sept. 15 and 16 as a special time of prayer and adoration. We had been planning a weekend celebration that weekend, marking the parish's 50th anniversary, but this is not a time for celebration. It is a time for prayer and new resolve."

*Read Father White's full statement on Facebook **here**.*

Father Collin Poston - St. Anthony Shrine in Emmitsburg and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont

"In these current times of confusion, doubt, sadness or anger, instead of letting our passions rule us, we should come to Jesus in his flesh and blood, in his Eucharist. With Peter, who like many didn't understand, we too say "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68.) In the days ahead, may Jesus give true conversion, healing and purification to our Church, and may we as its members be

truly strengthened by him – and as a most intentional Church be his instruments of reconciliation, renewal and compassion.”

*Click **here** to read Father Poston’s full reflection.*

Father William A. Au - Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Mount Washington

“This is not the first time in its long history that the Church has lost the confidence and trust of its people, though for us it is perhaps the worst time in our experience. When the Church has been able to recover from such periods, it was because of those whose faith in Christ allowed them to change the Church. I believe that is our task and challenge. We cannot be passive victims expecting the hierarchy to make it all better. The people of the Church (laity and clergy together in equal partnership) must demand and make that change. We must not be afraid to push back and hold accountable those who are given leadership roles which are meant to be focused on service. We must be willing to take the responsibility to shape this thing which has shaped us, the Church.”

*Click **here** to read Father Au’s full homily, delivered Aug. 25-26.*

*Click **here** to read Archbishop William E. Lori’s homily, delivered at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen.*

*Learn more about the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s response to the abuse crisis **here**.*