

Pope says sex abuse crisis is 'terrifying' example of church failings

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO PORTUGAL - Pope Benedict XVI said the priestly sex abuse scandal is a "terrifying" crisis that comes from inside the church - not from an outside attack - and requires purification and penance to overcome.

The pope made some of his strongest remarks to date on the sex abuse cases during an in-flight press conference May 11 on his way to Portugal for a four-day visit that was to include the Marian shrine of Fatima.

Asked if the message of Fatima, which foresaw times of trials and suffering for the church, could be applied to the sex abuse crisis, the pope said essentially that it could.

"Today we can discover in this message that attacks on the pope and the church come not only from the outside, but the suffering of the church comes from inside the church, from sins that exist inside the church," he said.

"This we have always known, but today we see it in a really terrifying way. The biggest weight on the church doesn't come from the enemies outside but is born from sin inside the church," he said.

"And so the church has a profound need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn on the one hand forgiveness but also the necessity of justice. And forgiveness does not substitute justice," he said.

"We have to relearn these essentials: conversion, prayer, penance," he said.

The pope, who helped explain the third secret of Fatima when it was published in 2000, said the Fatima messages extend in time to apply to the church's continuing journey, which is accompanied by suffering.

The pope also spoke about the economic crisis that is shaking Portugal and the rest of Europe, saying it illustrates the need for a greater infusion of ethics and morality in the market.

“I would say this economic crisis has a moral dimension that no one can fail to see,” he said. “The events of the last two or three years have demonstrated that the ethical dimension must enter into the world of economic activity.”

Pure economic pragmatism will always lead to problems, he said.

The church’s social teaching has a big role to play, seeking to create a serious dialogue with the financial world and highlighting the moral responsibilities of economic systems, the pope said.

“So here we need to enter into a concrete dialogue. I tried to do this in my encyclical, ‘Caritas in Veritate,’ ” he said.

The pope said secularism was not a new problem in Portugal or Europe, but had taken a more radical turn in recent years. He said here, too, the church needs to engage in bridge-building and dialogue, making sure its voice is heard and helping to restore an openness to transcendent reality.