

Letter to Seminarians

September 7, 2018

Dear Seminarian of the Diocese of El Paso,

Greetings in the Lord! I hope this letter finds your new school year off to a good start.

I know that this time has not been without a number of unsettling concerns that touch very closely upon your life as a seminarian and your future life, God willing, as a priest. When you first began hearing that quiet whisper of a calling from God it likely brought you a certain amount of discomfort because you didn't feel worthy of so exalted a calling.

Many of you may have even had other exciting plans for your life. Somehow the Spirit's voice in you became loud enough that despite whatever uncertainties you may have had, you knew you had to try to listen and to do your best to discern this holy urging. That was my experience as well. It is not acceptable that anyone pursuing this calling would have to face sexual advances on the part of peers or superiors in the very place he had come to seek to give his life to God's service.

When I heard of the allegations that are coming to light regarding Cardinal Theodore McCarrick in these past few weeks recounting sexual abuse of altar servers and seminarians I was shocked and sickened. It is hard to imagine behavior more contrary to the integrity and holiness we expect of our leaders and which we seek to form in our seminarians and all the faithful.

I want to assure you that what we are hearing about this Cardinal is not at all reflective of seminary or priestly life. It is an aberration and a despicable failure of an individual whom many admired and it is a failure of leaders in the Church to bring allegations to light and properly investigate them. For this failure of leaders in the Church I, as a person of responsibility in the Church, am deeply sorry.

Fr. Mariano, the formation team that assists him, and I take this responsibility with great seriousness. Our goal is to assist you to continue to know the Lord, to grow as a disciple, to discern your call to the priesthood and to be formed as a holy and effective

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Page Two

minister of the Lord. This is the hope and the unwavering commitment we have made. It is what we pray for and work to accomplish every day.

From the day I arrived in the Diocese of El Paso I have committed myself to deal with any allegations of abuse by a person associated with the Church in an energetic and transparent way. I am committed to serving the victim and not to be driven by concern for the image of the Church. I have dedicated myself to the development of programs and procedures that will serve as models for the Church and society in the protection of all children and vulnerable adults. This continues to be my commitment and that of those who serve the Church of El Paso. No one who would live such a double life and who would violate the human dignity of others should find refuge in the priesthood, the episcopacy or any other ministry of the Church.

In regard to all the news that is swirling about even including calls for the resignation of Pope Francis and accusations regarding various Church leaders my advice to you is to try not to get caught up in that. Much of it is rumor and innuendo. There is no need for you to be caught up in that because it will only distract you from what must be your focus, pursuing your growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Be assured that the Church will survive this challenge and will even be strengthened by it as has been the case for these 2,000 years of her history. Our faith and trust is not in human beings. There is only one Savior and he remains the head of His Body, the Church.

I want to thank you for your openness to seeking God's plan for your life and for trust you have placed in me and in those involved in you formation. Be assured that we are rededicating ourselves to being worthy of that trust. Never hesitate to contact me or Fr. Mariano, if you have any questions or concerns.

Please pray for me and know that you are in my daily prayers!

Sincerely yours in Christ, our Shepherd,


Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz, DD