

Letter to Priests

August 31, 2018

Dear brothers,

Greetings to you in the Lord!

We find ourselves living through a time that is in some ways unparalleled in the long history of the Church. The report of a Cardinal of the Church who abused seminarians and servers, the Grand Jury report from Pennsylvania and, more recently, the unprecedented report of an Archbishop who served as Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, have caused many of us to become profoundly unsettled and to question the Church we thought we knew.

I am under no illusion that any letter from me could resolve your questions or calm your anxieties. The truth is that these revelations have also left me with a wide range of emotions from shock, to anger, to the feeling of being lost on an uncharted sea.

I have reflected on these developments and focused on looking for a path forward. First, I believe that this is a time when we must all cling more firmly to Jesus than ever. This is not merely an institutional problem we are facing that can be resolved by changes in policies and structures; these are first and foremost spiritual, faith and moral issues that will only be resolved through a deeper conversion in all of our lives. We, the leaders and shepherds, must be first in this rededication to our Faith and to the original purity of the calling we received.

Secondly, we must not allow this trial to separate us or to turn us against one another. Even more challenging days will probably soon confront priests in this and other dioceses around the country. We will need to face our coming trials and tribulations with courage and integrity. Our united, mutually supportive efforts will be a crucial witness and will assist us all in the knowledge that we are not alone.

As we face our own challenges as clergy we must resist the temptation to become withdrawn or defensive with the people we serve. It is important to remember that the people we serve, the People of God, are struggling to maintain their faith in the face of these scandals. They need us! Those who have been victimized particularly need us! They need to see our faithful, serene commitment to serve God and His people. It is essential for them to know and believe that we are doing all in our power to implement our VIRTUS Safe Environment program to the full. They need to feel comfortable that their children are safe.

What has understandably scandalized people is the awareness that for years there were high ranking clergy who had knowledge of abusive situations and infidelity by clergy to their promises, yet they turned a blind eye or even protected the wrongdoers. Actions were taken to protect the reputations of those in power at the expense of the little ones who were being harmed. I ask for all priests of this diocese to disclose any knowledge they may have of abuse,

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past or present, in which clergy or others may have been involved. If you have any such knowledge, even if it is from the distant past, please bring it to Susan Martinez, our Victim's Assistance Coordinator, to Fr. Ben Flores, Patricia Fiero or to me.

The #metoo movement has made us more aware that even if a sexual relationship by a member of the clergy is with an adult, it usually is a result of an abuse of power on the part of the minister. Those who have been forced or enticed into these relationships can be seriously harmed both emotionally and spiritually. These situations also need to be strongly confronted by the leadership of the Church. If you are aware of such relationships please report them to the appropriate authorities.

The promises we made when we were Ordained to live a chaste celibate life should be considered by us to be a great gift tying us to Christ who gave himself as a pure offering for our salvation. As we face these challenging days let us rededicate ourselves to generously live these promises. When we do so with self-giving charity we will, in our own flesh, reveal Christ's gracious work in our midst today.

May God bless you in your faithful ministry!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Mark J. Seitz, DD
Bishop of El Paso