

From the Pope, From the Bishop, and From the Pastor

Dear Friends,

So many of you thanked me after each of the Masses last weekend for my homily on the sex abuse situation. One of the many email responses I got had this comment: "You are genuine in the expression of your pain and outrage. You draw the community to their own personal and collective power as community, as those baptized into the life of Christ who is one with God and draws us to that oneness." Thank you. May God help us to focus on our faith and our responsibility in these trying times.

You must have heard about the letter of Pope Francis on the same topic and he said that "No effort must be spared" to prevent future cases of clerical sexual abuse and "to prevent the possibility of their being covered up." In the letter of August 20, the Pope wrote: "I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons." "The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced," Pope Francis said. "But their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence them." "The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain," he said, "and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults." Please read the whole letter (it is only 2000 word long!) and see the seriousness with which the Pope is dealing with it. I believe that these horrible reports have made our Bishops all the more conscious of their role to remedy the situation and make the safety of our children and teens fool proof. Bishop James Checchio of our Diocese has addressed this issue in a very meaningful letter stating: "It is a painful and horrific chapter in our history that must never be repeated." You can read both letters – of the Pope and of our Bishop - on our parish website.

Besides the role of the bishops, the Holy Father is insisting that all Catholics must be involved in the effort to accompany victims, to strengthen safeguarding measures and to end a culture where abuse is covered up. Here's the way he expresses it so beautifully in the same letter: *"It is impossible to think of a conversion of our activity as a Church that does not include the active participation of all the members of God's People. Indeed, whenever we have tried to replace, or silence, or ignore, or reduce the People of God to small elites, we end up creating communities, projects, theological approaches, spiritualities and structures without roots, without memory, without faces, without bodies and ultimately, without lives. This is clearly seen in a peculiar way of understanding the Church's authority, one common in many communities where sexual abuse and the abuse of power and conscience have occurred. Such is the case with clericalism, an approach that "not only nullifies the character of Christians, but also tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people". Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say "no" to abuse is to say an emphatic "no" to all forms of clericalism."*

Why this insistence from the Pope? Because, as I pointed out in my homily, the Church is the entire "People of God" and not just the hierarchy. The Pope wants the participation of all the lay faithful. I pray for this to become a reality. I pray that the laity will respond to this invitation to a greater participation in the Church. Yes, we all are in it together to solve this crisis, we all feel the anger as well as the pain of it all - as the Pope rightly reminds us in his opening line: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it" (1 Cor 12:26).

Your brother in Christ,
Fr. Abraham Orapankal

These are the links to access the letters from Bishop Checchio and from Pope Francis:

<https://diometuchen.org/bishop/from-the-bishop-s-desk/2018/letter-from-bishop-heckchio-on-the-pennsylvania-grand-jury-report/>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>