

**“Living the Catholic Life in the Current Crisis”
Annual Dinner of Catholic Citizens of Illinois
October 22, 2018**

**The Carlisle Banquet Hall
Lombard, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be here with you and a privilege for me to speak at this Annual Dinner of the Catholic Citizens of Illinois. Today, October 22, 2018, is the feast day of Saint John Paul the Great and marks the fortieth anniversary of the Mass for the Inauguration of his pontificate, celebrated on this day forty years ago in Saint Peter’s Square. He began his homily by quoting the first Pope, Saint Peter, who said to Jesus:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16).

These words were spoken by Simon, son of Jonah, in the district of Caesarea Philippi. . . . These words mark the beginning of Peter’s mission in the history of salvation, in the history of the People of God. From that moment, from that confession of Faith, the sacred history of salvation and of the People of God was bound to take on a new dimension: to express itself in the historical dimension of the Church.¹

Saint Peter's profession of faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" is essential for us to keep in mind tonight as we consider how to live as Catholics in the current crisis. Some commentators, would use "crises" in the plural, referring to a crisis of doctrine as well as a crisis of scandals.² Since we would likely be here into the wee hours of the morning if I were to try to address both of these crises, I will confine myself for now to the latter crisis, the crisis of the sexual abuse scandals. I have spoken on "Doctrine, Law and Practice in Light of *Mitis Iudex* and *Amoris Laetitia*" at the North West Regional Canon Law Convention in Portland, Oregon. That talk will be published soon in *The Jurist*. Next month I will speak on "Legalism, Laxism and Antinomianism in the Church Today" in Shreveport, Louisiana, at the Conference of Chancery and Tribunal Officials for the States of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. I hope to have that talk published, too, which should provide you with some future bedtime reading!

With regard to the crisis of the sexual abuse scandals, there is unfortunately, much to say. The past several weeks have seen an unprecedented unfolding of a highly disturbing series of events in the Church here in the United States. In June, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, a

former priest of the Archdiocese of New York and Archbishop Emeritus of Washington D.C., was removed from public ministry for credible and substantiated allegations of abuse of a minor. In July, Pope Francis accepted McCarrick's resignation from the College of Cardinals.

On August 14, a Pennsylvania Grand Jury reported that more than 300 priests across Pennsylvania sexually abused children over seven decades, protected by church leaders who covered it up. Then, on the heels of that devastating report, on August 22nd, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganó, the Vatican's former ambassador to the United States—officially called an Apostolic Nuncio—wrote an extensive letter claiming that Pope Francis knew about the sex abuse allegations against former Cardinal McCarrick for years, but chose to cover up the charges. Archbishop Viganó has written two follow-up letters in response to those who dispute his claims or accuse him of disloyalty to Pope Francis.

The reaction to hearing this convergence of distressing reports has been very understandable anger and even outrage on the part of many people—including myself. While I felt compelled to respond immediately to the news, since that time, I have only experienced increasing anger, disgust, and a desire to act.

The words from Jesus in the Gospel of Mark about the evils that come from the violation of the natural law are critical to keep in mind as we reflect on the recent revelations of what can only be described as horrifying abuse and neglect of authority among some priests and bishops of the Church in our own country. We may notice that all the things Jesus lists are the subjects of the Ten Commandments: “From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”

As Saint Thomas Aquinas tells us, the original and proper use of law is to help people to live virtuously. It is to encourage their basic goodness, and to help them live together in harmony. The basis of all Gospel teaching about law is that there is the eternal law of God, and the natural law within humans, which shares in the eternal. The summary of the natural law for us is the Ten Commandments. These are not arbitrary rules imposed upon us by a stern God. They are reminders of the best part and highest aspirations of the natural human law that lives within all of us. Given that we are fallen creatures, we sometimes forget how to live in harmony with each other and with God. The Ten Commandments remind us of how to do this.

Unfortunately, too many people have forgotten or ignored these basic precepts.

In light of this current distressing situation, I have called for a response that must include several components, namely, public prayers of repentance and acts of atonement, new measures for review of bishops' handling of cases and a reaffirmation of my own commitment to a zero-tolerance policy in our diocese, and a call for spiritual renewal at all levels of the Church. I would like to share additional detail and perspective on each of these three components of response – especially the first.

With regard to public prayers and acts of atonement, I personally committed myself to a period of prayer and fasting in reparation and atonement as a way of confronting this crisis in our Church on spiritual grounds. Specifically, I abstained from all meat and alcohol (except the sacramental wine used at Mass) for forty days, which I began on August 28, the Feast of Saint Augustine, and ended on October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. During those weeks, I also fasted between meals on Fridays. On October 7, I ran a marathon in Long Beach, California, with the LIFE Runners, a pro-life running group with almost 9,000 teammates in all 50 states and 35 nations. I finished in 4 hours, 59 minutes and 43 seconds,

achieving my goal of running under 5 hours with 17 seconds to spare! I was running on a sore ankle, so I was happy just to be able to finish.

The sore ankle developed a few weeks ago when I ran long runs of 17 miles, 19 miles and 20 miles three weeks in a row. That made my training and running of the marathon more painful than usual. There is a lot of pain involved in training and in the actual running of a marathon. In the past, I have offered up that pain for various intentions. The pain was a gift from God as I offered my suffering in repentance and atonement for my sins and the sins of all bishops, priests and deacons.

During one of my training runs, after I finished praying the rosary, I kept holding the rosary in my hand with the cross of the rosary between my index finger and my thumb. I felt the Lord say to me, "Hold fast to the cross. Embrace the pain." During the last few miles of the Long Beach Marathon I kept repeating that to myself like a mantra: "Hold fast to the cross. Embrace the pain."

October 7 was the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. While running the marathon, I prayed over 200 Hail Mary's while meditating on the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries. I offered these prayers for the

Pope and for all the clergy, religious and laity of our diocese, as well as for family members and friends.

This was my 24th marathon in 24 years! As in the past, I used my marathon run to raise money for charity. The charitable cause that I designated for the 2018 LIFE Runners Marathon was the Divine Mercy Senior Living Community that we are planning to build in Glen Carbon, Illinois. I am grateful to all who generously supported this cause.

My weekend with the LIFE Runners included praying in front of a Planned Parenthood facility, followed by visiting a crisis pregnancy center and celebrating the Saturday Evening Mass at Holy Innocents Church in Long Beach. As we continued to celebrate Respect Life Month during the month of October, I offered some reflections on the 50th anniversary of the encyclical letter of Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*. While this document is best known for its condemnation of artificial contraception as contrary to God's divine plan for spouses to give themselves totally to each other, *Humanae Vitae* also makes clear that abortion is an unacceptable form of contraception.

As further form of prayer and repentance in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, at 7:00 PM on Monday, October 1, the Feast Day of Saint Thérèse

of the Child Jesus – known as the “Little Flower” – I led a liturgical service of “Repentance and Prayer for those Harmed in the Church” at our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield. Each of our Deans conducted this liturgical service of “Repentance and Prayer for those Harmed in the Church” at the same time at a location designated in each of our deaneries. As sins of sexual depravity and complicity in their cover-up have deeply infected and wounded the Church, it is crucial that we pray for these evils to be eradicated from the whole Church.

Our priests also gathered for a liturgical service of “Repentance and Prayer for those Harmed in the Church” at the beginning of our Convocation of Priests on Monday evening, September 17, at 7:00 PM at Mother of Perpetual Help Church in Maryville, Illinois.

As I have previously said, we bishops of the United States must offer public prayers of repentance and acts of atonement for the sins of all bishops, priests and deacons. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has announced that we will have prayers of repentance and acts of atonement at our next meeting in November in Baltimore.

I humbly invite all of you to join me in the holy battle for purification of our Church throughout the world and here at home by offering prayers of repentance and acts of atonement, such as fasting. The nature of the battle at hand can be seen in these well-known verses in Genesis: "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground'" (Gen 4: 9-10). There is no such thing as private sin. The horrible sins that we have all endured learning about – and the souls of those damaged by them – hurt us all in the mystical body of Christ. In the same way, the prayers and sacrifices of the faithful are effective in bringing about spiritual healing to the whole Body of Christ.

In addition to public prayers of repentance and acts of atonement, I reiterate my increased resolve and continued commitment to a zero-tolerance policy in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I have pledged our diocese's full cooperation with law enforcement officials to make every available effort to protect our people. I am firmly committed to provide a safe environment that will effectively protect against sexual abuse, especially against children, seminarians and vulnerable adults. Such abuse will not be

tolerated and will be dealt with promptly when reported or discovered. In this regard, we have a nine-person Review Board, the majority of whom are lay people, who deal with allegations of clerical sexual misconduct with minors. Allegations of such misconduct may be made by calling the Diocese's Child Abuse Reporting and Investigation number (at 217-321-1155). Individuals may also contact the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Child Abuse Hotline (at 1-800-25-ABUSE).

Allegations of financial misconduct or sexual misconduct with adults are handled by a separate group called the Special Panel for Clergy Misconduct, the majority of whom are also lay people and which is headed by Mr. William Roberts, formerly the United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois. There is a hotline to report financial misconduct or adult sexual misconduct committed by priests, deacons or lay employees in our diocese (1-866-346-2003) and a dedicated email address to report such misconduct (reportmisconduct@gmail.com). These hotline calls and email messages go directly to the office of Mr. Roberts. If these measures are not sufficiently effective, I am open to new safeguards. We will review the firm commitments we have made and the concrete steps we have taken to protect against clergy misconduct in our diocese. We are also willing to consider any

additional actions that would be helpful in making our safe environment program more effective.

At the national level, new mechanisms must be adopted to facilitate the reporting of allegations involving bishops and then investigate and evaluate accusations independent of the structures of the individual dioceses and the USCCB. Specifically, there should be a lay investigator and an independent panel comprised primarily of lay people to review allegations against bishops and make recommendations to the Apostolic Nuncio, who serves as the Pope's representative in Washington, D.C., who would then forward the findings to the Holy See. This is necessary since bishops are appointed by the Pope and are accountable to him, who alone has the power to remove a bishop.

This would be analogous to what was done to address allegations of sexual misconduct with minors against priests and deacons. When I was appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1992, the first task I was given was to work with a committee to draft policies and procedures for handling allegations of clerical sexual misconduct with minors. The key features of this new system included the appointment of a full-time lay administrator and a nine-member Fitness Review Board, the majority of

whom were lay people. We also instituted a toll-free hotline that went directly to the lay administrator. I was then appointed as the Cardinal's delegate to the Fitness Review Board, attending their meetings and serving for the next ten years as liaison between the Cardinal and the Review Board.

At the time, the review board concept was somewhat controversial, since some clergy objected that priests and deacons were accountable only to their bishop, not lay people. However, this objection was overcome by the fact that the final decision was always made by the diocesan bishop, who would be better informed through an independent review of the facts and the credibility of the allegations. Eventually, similar policies and the review board model were adopted by most dioceses and religious communities, strengthened nationally by the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People and the related Essential Norms that were adopted by the USCCB in 2002 with subsequent recognition by the Holy See.

Similarly, the accountability of bishops to the Holy Father is not compromised by an intermediary body that could independently review the facts and credibility of the allegations and make recommendations accordingly to the Apostolic Nuncio for further action with the proper authorities at the Vatican.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have called for a profound spiritual renewal at all levels of the Church. When I say all levels, I include not only bishops, priests and deacons, but also the highest level of the hierarchy, the Pope. In his August 20th letter to the People of God, Pope Francis writes, “With shame and repentance, we acknowledge as an ecclesial community that we were not where we should have been, that we did not act in a timely manner, realizing the magnitude and the gravity of the damage done to so many lives. We showed no care for the little ones; we abandoned them.” I presume that he includes himself among the “we” to whom he refers. Indeed, in a letter this past April 11 to the bishops of Chile, Pope Francis asked forgiveness for his “serious errors of assessment and perception.” In a meeting with abuse survivors in Chile this past May, Pope Francis said, “I was part of the problem, I caused this and I’m sorry.”

Now, with reference to the situation in our own country, the former Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, has revealed a set of facts and circumstances that are deeply troubling as they relate to the awareness, actions, and inactions at the very highest levels of the Church. Archbishop Viganò has provided his written testimony stating that Pope Francis “must honestly state when he first learned about the

crimes committed by McCarrick, who abused his authority with seminarians and priests. In any case, the Pope learned about it from me on June 23, 2013 and continued to cover for him.” When asked about this aboard the papal plane on his return flight from Ireland on August 26, Pope Francis said, “Read the statement carefully and make your own judgment. I will not say a single word on this.” I stated publicly at the time, with all due respect, that this response was not adequate. Given the gravity of the content and implications of the former Nuncio’s statement, it is important for all the facts of this situation to be fully reviewed, vetted, and carefully considered.”

Along these lines, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the USCCB, promised on August 1st that the “USCCB would exercise the full extent of its authority, and would advocate before those with greater authority, to pursue the many questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick.” On August 16th, he called for an Apostolic Visitation, “working in concert with a national lay commission granted independent authority, to seek the truth.” On August 26, Cardinal DiNardo convened the Executive Committee of the USCCB, which “reaffirmed the call for a prompt and thorough examination into how the grave moral failings of a brother bishop could have been tolerated for so long and proven no impediment to his advancement.”

Cardinal DiNardo added that the “recent letter of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò brings particular focus and urgency to this examination. The questions raised deserve answers that are conclusive and based on evidence. Without those answers, innocent men may be tainted by false accusation and the guilty may be left to repeat sins of the past.”

Toward that end, Pope Francis has ordered that an investigation by the Archdiocese of New York into sex abuse allegations against ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick be combined with a “thorough study of the entire documentation present in the archives of the dicasteries and offices of the Holy See” in order to ascertain “all the relevant facts, to place them in their historical context and to evaluate them objectively.”³ The Holy Father’s call for a “thorough study of the entire documentation” at the Vatican is a welcome development.

When these stories first broke a few weeks ago, I gave several media interviews to reporters inquiring about these matters. One reporter asked what I would say to people whose faith in the institution of the Church has been shaken by these scandals. I answered by saying that, ultimately, we are not called to put our faith in an institution; we are called to put our faith in Jesus Christ. Our Lord gave us the Church as a means to help us to get to

heaven, but the Church is not an end in itself. Our Lord also gave us bishops, priests and deacons to help the Christian faithful on this journey of faith. We must never forget that this is a ministry of service and not of privilege. Where trust has been broken or confidence has been eroded, we must work assiduously to regain it.

The late Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Francis George, for whom I was privileged to serve as Chancellor of the Archdiocese and as Auxiliary Bishop, wrote in his book entitled, *The Difference God Makes*, "The world permits everything and forgives nothing. God and the Church do not permit everything but forgive everything."

This incisive statement has profound implications for us as we consider how to live as Catholics in the current crisis facing the Church. The seemingly endless stream of reports of clerical sexual abuse of minors going back for decades is deeply disturbing and has caused some people to question their faith. For some, these scandals may be a stumbling block that hinders newcomers from joining the Church. For those who are long-time members of the Church, the current crisis may prompt questioning and doubts about their continued identification with an institution so marred by corruption.

It could be that God has permitted this current crisis as a test of faith, however, the test itself may not be what we initially think it is. The question of how God could permit such evil in the Church is answered rather simply and somewhat easily by citing the freedom that God has given to all human beings to choose between good and evil. He does not want to force our love, but wishes for us to love Him freely. It follows that sin is a logical consequence of this freedom, since the freedom to choose good must also entail the freedom to choose evil.

I would suggest that the greater test of faith may be whether or not we truly believe that “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). For a world that “permits everything and forgives nothing,” it is difficult to believe that anyone could possibly forgive those who commit such heinous crimes and serious sins as the sexual abuse of minors.

Yes, we have this general understanding that Jesus came to forgive our sins and gave us the Church as the means of our salvation. We have no problem believing that God forgives our lesser faults, such as saying nasty things to others, treating people rudely, and not saying our daily prayers. But does God really forgive murderers, thieves, drug abusers, adulterers,

fornicators and even perpetrators who sexually abuse children? The answer, hard to believe, is yes, if they repent and beg for His mercy.

In fact, God not only forgives grave sins, but expects us to do the same. Immediately after teaching His disciples the prayer that we now call the "Our Father," Jesus added, "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

In reminding ourselves of this teaching, I am not saying that perpetrators of serious sins that are also crimes should not be punished. In this regard, Pope St. John Paul II in 2002 clearly and emphatically declared, "People need to know that there is no place in the priesthood and religious life for those who would harm the young." Taking their cue from the Holy Father, in 2002 the Catholic Bishops of the United States adopted a "zero tolerance" policy for clergy who sexually abuse children. The *Essential Norms* that accompany the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* states, "When even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or is established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law, the offending priest or deacon will be removed permanently from

ecclesiastical ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case so warrants” (Essential Norms, n. 6). This norm remains in effect.

So how does zero tolerance square with mercy and forgiveness? Is God the Just Judge or God the Merciful Father? The Catholic answer to such a question, of course, is not either/or, but both. These attributes of God are not contradictory, inconsistent or incompatible. God is all merciful as well as all just. It may be difficult for us from our human perspective to understand how that can be, but God does not have to diminish one of His attributes in order to manifest another. Just as Jesus is true God and true man without either nature canceling or detracting from the other, God is always merciful and always just.

This is described eloquently in Psalm 89, where God says, “If they fail to observe my statutes, do not keep my commandments, I will punish their crime with a rod and their guilt with blows. But I will not take my mercy from him, nor will I betray my bond of faithfulness” (Psalm 89:32-34). Parents can see this in their relationship with their children: at times parents must correct their children and punish them, but they do not stop loving them. In fact, parents correct their children precisely because they love them.

So does God our Father love us, correct us, and call us to repentance and conversion, as He asks us all to do the same with each other.

Even in the face of adversity, we must remain convinced that Christ has not abandoned us, and so we must not give up on our commitment to live as His disciples. We must recognize that giving up is exactly what Satan wants, for he is the prince of darkness. He wants us to turn our back on our Lord and His Church. On the contrary, like the disciples in the early Church, we must use this unfortunate set of circumstances to commit ourselves to live ever more fully for Christ as His disciples. We must keep saying “yes” to God for the rest of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html.

² See, for example, Michael Brendan Dougherty, “The Case Against Pope Francis,” *National Review*, October 11, 2018, at <https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/10/29/case-against-pope-francis-catholic-church/>.

³ <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2018/10/06/pope-orders-thorough-study-of-vatican-archives-on-mccarrick/>.