

**Homily for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 1-2, 2018**

**To be read at all Weekend Masses in all the Churches of the
Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The past few 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, 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.

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 am personally committing 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 am abstaining 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 will continue until October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. During those weeks, I will also fast between meals on Fridays. On October 7, I plan to run a marathon in Long Beach, California, with the LIFE Runners, a pro-life running group. 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. This year I am offering the pain of my marathon training and running in repentance for the sins of all clergy – bishops, priests and deacons. I will also include this intention in the many rosaries that I will pray in the course of my running.

Further, at 7:00 PM on Monday, October 1, the Feast Day of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus – known as the “Little Flower” – I will lead 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 will conduct this liturgical service of “Repentance and Prayer for those Harmed in the Church” at the same time at a location to be 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 will also gather for a liturgical service of “Repentance and Prayer for those Harmed in the Church” at the beginning of our upcoming 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. Having spoken with Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), it is my understanding 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 participating in prayers of repentance, by fasting, and by coming to the prayer service on October 1 at 7:00 PM at the Cathedral or at the location in your deanery. 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 this Diocese, and all the practical steps outlined in my statement of August 19. I pledge our diocese's full cooperation with law enforcement officials to make every available effort to protect our people. 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.

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.” Frankly, but with all due respect, that response is 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. Toward that end, Pope Francis, Vatican officials and the current Apostolic Nuncio should make public the pertinent files indicating who knew what and when about Archbishop (formerly Cardinal) McCarrick and provide the accountability that the Holy Father has promised.

Over the past few days I have given several media interviews to reporters inquiring about these matters. I have pledged to share as much information as possible and work for solutions to rectify the situation.

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.

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 this 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.