



Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The news stories were shocking. We saw in black and white a list of Ottawa priests implicated in the sexual abuse of minors published in the city's English-language dailies.

Yet, there were not many surprises in the published articles, as people in Ottawa have heard the stories in the news of abuse and the conviction of priests over the years as they were reported. Rather, the shock came from seeing all the details displayed in one place. This laid out the enormity of the evil committed and the need for ongoing healing.

What are we to make of this? It is an opportunity for me as the leader of the archdiocesan Catholic community to reassure people that the procedures for handling these offenses in place today are not what they were in the past. We have learned from errors in the past and are constantly striving to improve how to create safe environments for all.

In recent years, we began a process in our parishes called Responsible Ministry in part to ensure the safety of all persons receiving and delivering ministry — with special attention paid particularly to minors and other vulnerable persons who come to our parishes for pastoral care from our priests, deacons, lay staff and volunteers. In addition, in September 2015, the Archdiocese of Ottawa adopted a Code of Pastoral Conduct that everyone in ministry is to commit to by signing their agreement to follow the terms of the Code.

This shocking moment can become a moment of purification for us in the Catholic community and serve to remind us to keep vigilant in protecting the vulnerable, especially children. We will continue to commit to making sure that our protocols for safety and security are being followed and are effective.

We Catholics may see in this reminder of our past failures a call from God to our Church to let go of all that does not come from the teaching and life of Jesus Christ, the Lord who loves, forgives, heals, and above all is merciful.

The situation in which we find ourselves humbles us all, making us feel raw in our exposure to public vilification and scorn. Still, the ties of communion among us Catholics will help us in this moment of testing. God is inviting us to come to grips with our sinfulness so that we can strive together towards a better future.

The task now is to get on with the valiant and caring service of our hard-working priests and the deacons, religious workers and the laity who collaborate with them. Our ministry is to accompany God's people in the joys and sorrows of their journey through life, strengthening them by the sacraments and sharing the Gospel message with others.

Some people have asked me how our priests are feeling these days. There was a Pastoral Day on Thursday and this gave us an opportunity to share our experience about being depicted in a negative light, with the very image of the priest as a servant of God under suspicion.

In reality, the priests' reactions are mixed, like those of the faithful laity: some feeling great sadness, others shame, many a wounded sense of "déjà vu". Some manifest optimism despite the present pain drawn from the fact that we are indeed doing many good things despite this negative publicity, while others quietly remain at their posts in ministry seeking the good of God's people. They have read the Code of Pastoral Conduct issued in the fall and have agreed to abide by it. They are committed to loving God and serving His people to the best of their ability.

We are learning from past failures—sins against the innocent—and we all wish we could undo them. Regrettably, all we can do at this moment is hang our heads in shame at the past and commit ourselves to making the necessary changes to improve, raising our hands to help wherever we can. Past mistakes in handling errant priests cannot be undone, but we can and do wish to do better in the future and to heal.

With God's help and the contribution of our wonderful priests, we will do better.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Terrence Prendergast".

✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa