

Article
The Catholic Voice
September 3, 2018

By Most Rev. Michael C. Barber, SJ

When I visited UC-Berkeley earlier this year and met with a large group of Catholic students for a discussion, the first question they asked me was “What do I tell my Catholic friend who no longer practices his faith because of the scandals in the Church?”

Many Catholics have had their faith shaken by the recent revelations in Pennsylvania, the scandalous behavior of an American cardinal and the recent letter from the former Apostolic Nuncio to the United States.

Here’s how I answered the students. When the famous English theologian and academic John Henry Newman converted to the Catholic Faith in 1845, his closest Anglican friends asked him “How can you join a Church which has such a history of corruption?”

He responded that the Church is a Divine institution in human hands. And humans are sinners. He also said that Christ himself knew there would be sin and corruption in the Church, therefore he purposefully chose Judas Iscariot as one of his apostles. So we can trace corruption right back to the origin, yet also show that “Where sin prevails, grace prevails all the more.” Christ also preached the parable of the wheat and weeds, to show that both would exist in the Church.

Yet that’s not the end of the story. Christ has destroyed sin, and death.

I also told the students that I’ve been in the Navy Reserve for 27 years. Every year about 50 admirals, generals and commanding officers of ships and bases are removed for misbehavior, ethical violations, criminal activity or “loss of confidence in ability to command.”

Yet we do not dismiss all commanders as criminal. One of my duties as chaplain is to visit the brig: the “jail” on a ship or Navy base.

Many of the prisoners are serving sentences for child abuse in their own families. Yet we do not say all sailors and Marines are abusers. We don’t say the Navy and Marine Corps is evil. No. We point out that the majority of sailors and Marines, and soldiers and airmen, are good and loyally serve our country every day: putting their lives on the line in many instances. In addition, we have real heroes in the military and recognize them with the Congressional Medal of Honor. So too in the Church. The majority of our priests serve you faithfully every day in every parish in our dioceses. We have heroes in the Church we call saints: like Mother Teresa and St. John Paul II.

There is no excuse for the priests who have committed crimes against innocent children. There is no excuse for bishops who have covered up these crimes or abetted them by transferring abusers to other parishes. This is evil.

The difference between the military and the church is that the military has a good accountability system. The Church does not. And we need to fix that now.

I endorse the call of Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the US bishops, to the Holy Father to establish an independent, lay-led review board that will address complaints against bishops.

In regards to the scandal of Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick and the revelations of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, we need such a board or commission to find the truth. Perhaps this could be the existing National Review Board. Whatever group is set up, it needs to find out “who knew what; and when did they know it?”

They need access to all the relevant documents, most of which are protected as “Papal Secrets.” They need to interview priests who worked in the Roman Curia and U.S. diocesan offices, who also would be released from the “Papal Secret” and allowed to testify.

We need to find out the truth. Only the truth will set us free. And only the pope can authorize the steps that need to be taken to find the truth.

But there is action I can take as bishop of our diocese.

In Oakland, I am calling for an independent outside audit of our Diocesan Review Board policies, to ensure we are faithfully following the precepts of the Dallas Charter, the procedures to investigate sexual abuse by clergy. I also am going to review the membership of the current Diocesan Review Board to make sure it has the number of lay experts we need in the fields of law enforcement, the judiciary, parents, a clinical professional specializing in treatment of childhood trauma and survivors.

In addition to these actions, I am inviting all priests, religious and lay faithful of the diocese to join me in a Novena to St. Joseph, patron of the Universal Church, from Sept. 6-14. We will distribute a Novena prayer to be read at all Masses every day.

On Sept. 14, the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, I call all of us in the diocese to a Day of Prayer, Penance and Reparation for the sins members of the Church have committed against innocent children.

I ask our priests to hold a Holy Hour with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in each parish at a convenient time, to pray in reparation, for healing for the victims, and for the cleansing and reform of the Church and her ministers.

I invite us all to do penance that day, especially my brother priests: to fast and make other personal sacrifices in reparation for the pain suffered by the innocent. As Pope Francis said in his “Letter to the People of God:” “The penitential dimension of fasting and prayer will help us as God’s People to come before the Lord and our wounded brothers and sisters as sinners imploring forgiveness and the grace of shame and conversion.”

In addition, I have been receiving many letters and emails asking me to stand up for the truth and not be afraid to speak out in front of all the bishops on the need for reform. May I also ask you to pray for this intention in the novena and day of reparation?

On the Feast of the Holy Cross, we will stand with Mary at the foot of her son’s cross, so that we can grow in the graces of compassion, justice, prevention, reparation — and strength to reform the Church.