

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND HEALING

St. James Cathedral, October 4, 2018
Archbishop Peter Sartain

Sisters and brothers in Christ, many years ago, when Bishop Elizondo, Bishop Mueggenborg, and I were ordained deacons, during the liturgy of ordination we lay prostrate on the floor of a church, as a sign of our total abandonment to God and his purposes. We did so again when we were ordained priests, and years later, when we were ordained bishops. All priests and deacons have done the same, and all of us repeat that moving gesture in our parish churches on Good Friday, as an act of surrender and devotion to the cross of Christ. Spiritually speaking, abandonment means many things. First and foremost, it is a sign of our emptiness, our unworthiness, our sinfulness, a sign that we place ourselves at the mercy of God. We must constantly empty ourselves, so that we will allow God to fill us – fill us again and again, empty us again and again, fill us again and again, with his wisdom and love. We remind ourselves that our ministry is not our own, that the people we love and serve are God's people, every one of them precious to him in ways far beyond telling, every single one of them the apple of his eye, the object of his fathomless favor.

We wanted to begin our Prayer of Repentance and Healing this evening with another act of abandonment and surrender, by praying the Confiteor together. As if those who know us needed further proof, we needed to proclaim publicly to God, and to you, that we know we are sinners, unworthy servants of the God of love, in need of constant forgiveness for the sins we commit, whatever their nature and number. At times we fail in our

abandonment to God and his purposes, and when we do, we also fail you, his beloved. We are especially contrite and saddened because some of God's beloved entrusted to our care were abused by the very ministers of God, bishops and priests and others, who should have been protecting them. We are deeply sorry, because we love God, and we love you, with all our heart.

Two weeks ago, the priests of the archdiocese gathered here in the Cathedral at noon to pray the Stations of the Cross. We wanted to be together at this troubling, scandalous time, to walk with Jesus, and with all those who have been harmed in the Church, on the way of Calvary. We wanted to express our sorrow to Jesus for any way we ourselves made his way of the Cross necessary. We wanted to express our fraternity as brothers in the Lord, as well as our solidarity with you, in this difficult time. And yes, we wanted to receive God's gift of hope at a troubling time in the Church.

Tonight, in an expression of lament and hope prepared and read by some of our sisters in Christ, we heard the sadness, hurt and frustration of God's people – we heard *your* voices. It is good to give voice to what our hearts and souls speak, because in praying just that way, honestly pouring out our hearts to God, we become receptive to the voice of God. How could you *not* say to God that you are saddened and hurt at this moment in the Church, that you are confused and angered by the actions of some of his ministers, and that we need the kind of healing and wisdom that only God can give? The Bible is filled with just such honest prayers, just such lamenting and hoping, in the ancient voices of God's beloved at other painful times, when indeed words could not be found to say what needed to be said.

The author of the Book of Lamentations speaks at just such a time. “My soul is deprived of peace,” he writes. “I have forgotten what happiness is... Remembering... over and over leaves my soul downcast within me.” A lament prayed openly and bluntly, with receptivity to God’s reply. “But I will call this to mind as my reason to have hope: the favors of the Lord are not exhausted; his mercies are not spent. My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore, I will hope in him.” God is not ashamed of us when we pour out our hearts; rather, he hears and listens and confirms his faithfulness. My sisters and brothers, tonight the authors of lamentations, both those in the Bible and those spoken in this Cathedral, also proclaim to us: “The favors of the Lord are not exhausted... therefore I will hope in him.”

In the past week, the Church has celebrated several feasts which speak directly to our hearts at this difficult moment. On September 29th, we celebrated those great messengers of God, the archangels, sent to bring word of God’s nearness: Michael, whose name means, “Who is like God?” Gabriel, “The Strength of God.” And Raphael, “God heals” – especially appropriate tonight. On October 1st, we celebrated the life of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, who left us the powerful “Little Way” of following Jesus as well as a treasury of wisdom. She once said, “My God!... I desire to love you and make you loved,” and in one of her final testaments, “I will spend my heaven doing good on earth.” On October 2nd, the Church gave us the Holy Guardian Angels, who guard and guide us at every moment as instruments of God’s constant care. Providentially, the Guardian Angels are the co-patrons of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

And today, St. Francis of Assisi. Who better than he teaches us to turn our hearts and souls first to Jesus, to believe in Jesus, and to hold fast to Jesus? And who more than he worked for healing of the Church herself? One day, Francis was praying alone in front of a crucifix in the abandoned chapel of San Damiano. Suddenly, he heard the words of Christ coming from the cross: “Francis, repair my house, which is falling into ruin.”

Who better than Francis, and Thérèse, and Mary the Mother of the Church can teach us how to live the Beatitudes?

In the Beatitudes, Jesus calls his disciples to live in such a way that we allow the grace of his heavenly Father to overtake us. Jesus calls us to surrender, to abandon ourselves to the wisdom and power of God, to trust that in every situation life brings our way – sin, poverty, mourning, hunger, injustice, blindness, persecution, heartbreak, and insult – we are to cling even more strongly to the ways of his Father, to trust ever more blindly that he will bring good out of all things. The favors of the Lord are never exhausted, his mercies never spent, so great is his faithfulness.

And so tonight, pouring out our hearts to God, we listen and pray with hope and resolve to work along with him, and side-by-side with each other, to rebuild his Church. God will show us how to restore trust, how he desires to heal and protect his precious little ones. God will affirm his call that we never stop proclaiming the gospel who is Jesus, his beloved Son and our Savior.

Who is like God, our Strength, our Healer? And who other than the saints teach us to love God and to share his love? And who guards and protects us but God and his angels?

And who but the saints teach us to be saints and to live the Beatitudes? They cheer us on to live lives of total surrender and trust in God!

To whom else would we ever go, Lord Jesus? You alone have the words of eternal life. We will hope in you.