

Love and do penance in this time of crisis

*By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ*

We might wonder today what is happening in the United States in these days following the most recent revelations regarding clergy sex abuse. It is necessary that each one of us — clergy and lay faithful — say sorry and do penance.

It is not enough to keep the apologies and the repentance for the cardinals and bishops that are implicated in the abuse — it is easy to tell somebody what to do — but we need to begin by reflecting on our own life.

Please do not be scandalized; anyone of us could fall. But if we know divine power, we can stand back up. With the help of God, we can stand up and go on.

I am so sorry for what has happened in the church, and I have deep sorrow and sadness in my heart for these victims, who have suffered at the hands of bishops, priests, seminarians, deacons, catechists, and other collaborators in the church.

It is also in this situation that we are invited, by the urging of the Mother of God, to follow the words of Jesus. And what Jesus tells us is of extreme importance today. Do not judge one another, but pray for and bless one another. If it is possible, do good deeds for others.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are all responsible for the church, not just Pope Francis or myself, but all of the members of the church. The church is our responsibility and also our duty. We need to begin with ourselves.

This crisis is an invitation to reflect on the Christian life today. Even in this situation, God wants to tell us something. We can learn something from him. But in order to listen clearly, we need to begin to do penance in our life.

We need to discern between the sinner and the sin. We never judge sinners. Jesus Christ gave everyone — every sinner he met — a chance. But we must also never side with sin. For this reason, I invite you to go to confession regularly.

If we want to change our church, if we want to change the church in the United States and the entire Catholic Church, it begins with the repentance of each and every one of us. Go to confession.

It might be a slogan of secular society to say, “I haven’t sinned; I didn’t kill anybody.” However, if we are honest, we must admit that we kill with our thoughts and our words every day, every hour.

I encourage you: please pray for us priests, please pray for bishops, please pray for deacons, please pray for seminarians, please pray for the religious, because the devil wants to destroy us first. Without shepherds, it is easy to manipulate the sheep and lead them astray.

Without your support, dear brothers and sisters, we cannot lead this church. Without your sacrifices, without your penance, it’s not possible to change the church. We, as clergy, need to see your example.

Your families are the future of the church; your children are the future of vocations. Every family needs to be an icon of the Holy Trinity and, just like the Trinity, the primary substance in a family must be love. Nothing else. This is the greatest commandment of Jesus Christ. Love each other.

This is the message of the Mother of God, at every site of her apparitions in the world. Please pray and love each other.

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