



ARCHDIOCESE OF AGANA

CHANCERY OFFICE

196 Cuesta San Ramon Ste. B • Hagatna, Guam 96910 • Tel: (671) 472-6116, (671) 562-0000 • Fax: (671) 477-3519

Protocol No. 2018-414

‘Drive out evil by the power of the good’ Archbishop Byrnes’ Letter to the Faithful on clergy sexual abuse

August 30, 2018

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The enormity of the revelations and accusations of clerical abuse of minors and other forms of sexual misconduct that have come to the fore over the past few weeks are not new to us. Having experienced the steady stream of men and women who have suffered at the hands of clergy over the past several decades, we join so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the Church in wondering when will it ever stop? The question grows larger when we find out that the number of perpetrators includes bishops and at least one cardinal. And while some, even the Holy Father, are alleged to be complicit in covering up the misdeeds of fellow bishops, meaningful evidence must be brought forward. I trust Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. His pledge to bring to the Holy Father a proposal for prompt, fair, and transparent procedures for dealing with the sins of the hierarchy gives me good hope.

We want meaningful action. Justice must be served. And while spiritual efforts are fruitful and effective in the eyes of God, something more is necessary. In just a few weeks we will engage in a process of mediation for the 180+ victims of clerical sexual abuse. We cannot fully repay what was taken from these brothers and sisters; we can only offer a token of justice through financial remuneration. Yet it is a tangible sign that demonstrates that we know a wrong has been done and there is a debt of justice to be paid. Ideally, it would be the perpetrators themselves who would be brought to justice; but time and distance preclude it at this time.

So, how do we get it to stop? Frankly, the second reading of Sunday’s Mass (James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27) offers us meaningful and practical advice. We are dealing with moral and spiritual evils, so a spiritual and moral response is necessary.

“All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

By His Son, Jesus, the word of truth, God has entrusted to us the gift of eternal life and happiness. It is a gift, not something we earned or worked for. And the gift itself is not just a

promise of a good future. Rather, we can begin even now living the eternal kind of life, a life of purpose and meaning, an opportunity for a life of peace, joy, love, kindness and self-control.

“Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.”

Faith is that welcome, a fruitful reception of God’s invitation and a surrender of my whole life to Him. And what has been planted must be nurtured in order to grow. So what do we do?

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding ourselves.”

Unfortunately, we are in this mess in no small part because of priests, bishops, religious brothers and sisters, teachers, etc. who were deluding themselves. While posing as doers of the word they violated it. Yes, we are all sinners in one way or another, yet many of us strive mightily to do the word with a good conscience. As St. Thomas would put it, it is better to limp along the right path than to run swiftly off of it.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

You can recognize a practicing Catholic Christian by how they live: they offer pure worship through their participation in the Mass; they do their best to care for the marginalized; they recognize the challenge of living in a social culture that opposes much of what Christians strive for, and they band together to stay true to the Gospel.

Philosophers and theologians often identify evil as “the absence of good” or “the negation of being.” That suggests that driving out evil demands an invasion of good. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). You and I have a part to play in our current struggle against the evil prevalent in our Church. My adherence to the promises I have made as a priest, and your commitment to a godly life, as married or single, contribute to the cleansing of the Church.

Yes, more is needed with respect to investigations, processes and procedures, but we have limited access to that effort. What I pledge right now is to take advantage of the spiritual helps to godliness and holiness appropriate to my vocation: the Liturgy of the Hours, the Sacrament of Penance, personal prayer, study of the Scripture, almsgiving, and godly conversations with brothers and sisters in Christ. I encourage my brother priests, the religious brothers and sisters, and you the lay faithful to do the same according to your own vocations. By so doing we will drive out evil by the power of the good.

Sincerely in Christ,



Archbishop Michael Byrnes
Archdiocese of Agaña