

Pope calls entire Church to pray and fast after clerical sex abuse revelations

Vatican City, Aug 20, 2018 / 05:55 am (CNA/EWTN News) - Pope Francis called Monday for every member of the Catholic Church to pray and fast in penance for the evil of clerical sex abuse, and to be involved in needed change within the Church.

"The only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God," Francis wrote Aug. 20.

In a letter to the entire Church following widespread revelations of clerical sex abuse in the Church in the United States, the pope invited "the entire holy faithful People of God to a penitential exercise of prayer and fasting, following the Lord's command."

"This can awaken our conscience and arouse our solidarity and commitment to a culture of care that says 'never again' to every form of abuse," he said. "Every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need."

In the letter, Francis acknowledged the recent publication of a report detailing abuse in six Pennsylvania dioceses, which included more than 300 priests and 1,000 victims, over a period of around 70 years.

Recognizing the deep pain and suffering endured by many minors who have experienced sexual abuse, or the abuse of power or conscience, at the hands of clerics, he said no effort to seek pardon or to repair the harm will ever be enough.

"Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated," he stated.

He said the words of St. Paul, that "'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it'... forcefully echo" in his heart.

The pope also emphasized that he thinks a conversion of the Church is "impossible" if it does not include the "active participation" of all the members of the Church, and he criticized the silencing or ignoring of some Catholics through the creation of elitist groups or projects.

In particular, all forms of clericalism should be rejected, he said, because clericalism undervalues baptismal grace and can lead to abuses by Church authority. Clericalism causes "an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today."

Voicing strong support for all the victims of clerical sex abuse and for their families, he said though most of the cases recently come to light, "belong to the past," as time goes on the pain of the victims has come to be more known.

He said the gravity and extent to which clerical sexual abuse of minors and other abuse has happened takes "coming to grips... in a comprehensive and communal way," and while conversion requires acknowledgment of the truth, it is "not enough."

"This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does... to be where the Lord wants us to be, to experience a conversion of heart in his presence. To do so, prayer and penance will help," he stated.

The penitential aspect of fasting will help Catholics to come before the Lord "as sinners imploring forgiveness and the grace of shame and conversion," so that actions "attuned to the Gospel" can follow, he explained.

He prayed that fasting and prayer will open people's ears to the pain of children, young people, and the disabled, that it will make Catholics "hunger and thirst for justice," and impel the Church "to walk in the truth, supporting all the judicial measures that may be necessary."

"It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable," he continued.

"Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others," he said. "An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion."