



A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

19 November 2018, 9:26 AM

Archbishop reports on USCCB meeting, reflects on hot button topics

At the recent USCCB meeting, my intention was to take notes in order to make a report to the people of the Archdiocese. As the meeting unfolded, it became more and more challenging to take note of everything in a very far-ranging and often confusing discussion. And so I thought I would comment on what I regard as hot button topics during the meeting:

Hot Button Topic #1 – The Vatican on the vote

A little over a week before the meeting, the bishops were asked to prepare for a discussion and vote on various proposals: standards of accountability for bishops; a special commission of laity to process complaints against a bishop; a protocol for handling such complaints; and making use of a third-party reporting mechanism.

The first day of the meeting opened, however, with the announcement that the Vatican asked the bishops *not* to vote on those proposals before the February 2019 meeting of Pope Francis with the Presidents of every episcopal conference around the world.

So, at the meeting, the bishops did everything short of a vote, discussing and making modifications to the proposals, in order to provide the president of our episcopal conference (Cardinal DiNardo) a clear idea about the direction we think we should go when he attends the February 2019 meeting.

In my opinion, some tried to create a controversy where there wasn't one; indeed, I think not voting was a good thing. Proposals were being made too quickly for them to be given appropriate reflection. Also, the issue of clergy sexual abuse is not a problem only in the United States, and so it is preferable to have a common approach to dealing with the misconduct of bishops.

Hot Button Topic #2 – The McCarrick scandal

A few bishops said that people in their dioceses were mainly interested in answers to questions about who knew what, and when with regard to McCarrick.

In that regard, this past October Pope Francis started a formal investigation into the sordid affair. When I hear anything about it, I'll let you know what I know.

I was pained to hear how comments on this topic sounded like veiled attacks on Pope Francis, even though he was not the one who made McCarrick a bishop, archbishop, and cardinal.

In fact, Pope Francis is the one who accepted McCarrick's resignation as a Cardinal, assigned him to a remote location to live out his days in prayer and penance, and began the investigation, saying in so many words, let the chips fall where they may.

More than once St. Catherine of Siena came to mind. She preached and wrote to many people, exhorting them to recognize the pope as "sweet Christ on earth" (*dolce Cristo sulla terra*), and to offer to the office of the Vicar of Christ due respect, shown in docility and obedience. The Pope is not other than human, and so weak, and subject to the evil one's temptation. No Pope is above reproach, and it seems that Pope Francis would be the first one to admit all this about himself, and to reproach himself when needed.

Hot Button Topic #3 – Involving laity in the investigations

One of the proposals put forward is to create a special commission, made up almost entirely of laity, which would act independently of bishops to investigate allegations against bishops of sexual abuse of minors, of sexual misconduct with adults, and of failures to report allegations of clergy sexual abuse of minors.

There was consensus (myself included) on the principle of involving laity in the oversight and investigation of allegations made against bishops. The consensus was less strong on the particulars about what that looks like.

For example, there was disagreement about whether the McCarrick investigation should or could be turned over to such a commission. Also, there was also difference of opinion about how to constitute such a commission, ranging from spending hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to establish a standing national special commission, to using the already-existing review board of a metropolitan archdiocese (here in Iowa, Dubuque).

It was agreed that allegations against bishops need to be dealt with in a timely and transparent manner, and that offending bishops need to be held accountable for the consequences of their sinful, criminal, and/or negligent behavior.

Hot Button Topic #4 – Clericalism

The connection between the current crisis and clericalism needs further reflection, but I believe there is one.

Sometimes deacons, priests and bishops believe that they are entitled to go first, to be served by others, and served the best of things; that they are superior to others, and so entitled to respect and deference; that they are the expert, and so the last word in the exercise of authority, while others are bystanders, passively receiving what is decided.

And sometimes others believe that about deacons, priests and bishops; either way, it isn't true, good, or in any way beautiful.

Jesus addresses this lie, this worldly spirit with a corrective: you must be the last of all, and the servant of all; to be exalted, you must humble yourself; you must give in order to receive, and you receive according to the measure you use to give to others; do this – forgiveness, service, self-sacrifice – in memory of me, says Jesus.

All the Catholic faithful, but especially the ordained, and especially bishops, need to wield this word of Jesus as a shield over our minds and hearts, lest the devil plant there the bad seed of the weed of the spirit of the world.

In the end, at least one thing is certain: there will be no sweeping under the rug the issue of clergy sexual abuse, or turning a blind eye to it. We all have to do all we can to address this sin and crime.

By the way, happy Thanksgiving!

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque