A Day of Prayer & Penance for Priests
Renewing our Faithfulness to our Priesthood

Dear People of God,

As priests, as Catholics, and as men, we are revolted and heartbroken in hearing yet another wave of reports of abuse committed by other priests against the youth whom we are called to serve. Our hearts are with all the victims whose pain and suffering are unfathomable.

We know that you, like us, are shaken by recent reports which build upon the sickening revelations of the past. We, like you, are weary of them. Those priests who have committed these crimes have disgraced the dignity given them at ordination, and betrayed the trust and confidence placed in them by members of the Church and wider society. Although not personally guilty of these crimes, we know that we will bear the weight of these sins for years to come.

At the same time, we also love our faith and our priesthood. We came to our ministry guided not by our own decision, but because during the years of preparation for ordination we discerned the will of God calling us to serve Him and His people as priests. The words of St. Paul could well be our own: “If I preach the Gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! (1 Cor. 9:16)”

We are committed to rebuilding the trust that you place in us: when you come to us seeking the grace offered in the sacraments, when you listen to our homilies at Mass for spiritual nourishment, and when you turn to us for guidance, consolation, and support. We recognize the sacred trust implied when you call us “Father.” While some have failed grievously in living up to that title, we are resolved to show ourselves worthy of it.

In particular, those of us who have made a promise of celibacy renew our commitment to this way of life in which we have given ourselves for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and in lifelong service to God and His people.

We recognize that the above are only words, and that their authenticity will only be proven in the years ahead as we, despite our weaknesses, will strive to serve you with the same conviction with which we responded to God’s call to priesthood years ago, and ensure that the sins committed by priests in the past are never repeated.

Therefore, as a sign of our sorrow at the sins committed against God’s people and of our resolve to work for the renewal of the priesthood, we are committing ourselves to a day of prayer and penance on 13 September 2018. This is a Thursday, the day on which Christ instituted the priesthood at the Last Supper. It is also the feast of St. John Chrysostom, a fourth century bishop whose writings set a high ideal for priests – one for which we must strive now more than ever.

As penance and in reparation for the abuse committed by priests against the young and the vulnerable, on this day we will keep the same fast as that kept on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
Furthermore, we commit ourselves to spending the hour of 3-4 a.m. in prayer on the morning of 13 September for the healing of those victimized by sexual abuse at the hands of priests. While this hour calls for a small sacrifice on our part, it is a time to which we can commit to praying in unison (in our own time zones), without conflicting with other pastoral obligations. During this time we will also pray for the grace to be steadfast and faithful to the call we have received to serve you and to live up to the privilege of trust you place in us. This hour reflects the invitation of Christ to the disciples – then newly ordained priests – to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane at the time of His agony; it also mirrors the hour of the Passion.

As we make this commitment we recognize that there is much more to be done beyond this, but we know that any true reform begins with our own acceptance of our responsibility to be faithful to our vocation. And so, with these actions we commit ourselves to faithfulness: faithfulness to the God who called us to be priests and faithfulness to you who call us “Father.”

Mary, Queen of the Clergy, pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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