



*Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from?
The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace (James 3:18, 4:1).*

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

At the end of August, I returned from Ireland. While there I was blessed to con-celebrate Mass with Pope Francis for the World Meeting of Families. I am of Irish descent, born and raised for most of my life in Limerick. As I was growing up, the Catholic Church and Ireland seemed to be one. But, with the knowledge of sexual misconduct within the Church, this Catholicity was challenged and changed. So, as I processed into the Mass on Sunday, August 26, I was overwhelmed by the one-half million faithful who participated in this celebration. The media may never acknowledge this extraordinary number of faithful, but it struck me that those in attendance exceeded the number of registered Catholics in our Diocese of Orlando. I was humbled by the Holy Spirit filling the space of the earth, despite all the ‘bad news’ spurred through the Irish media during the time I visited.

St. James, in speaking with the early Christians, asks, “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from?” I have received your letters, your emails, and I pray for you as you are suffering. As Christ is beside me, before me, I pray for your forgiveness for the wrongdoing that you may have experienced at the hands of someone within the Church, whether bishop, priest, religious or lay. I pray for you as I know the news stories are disconcerting. The words you write pierce my heart as they speak of leaving the Church with maxims or ultimatums, ‘if I don’t do this or that.’ St. James tell us we, in our sinfulness, create the conflicts, not God. Are we becoming pharisaical where our interpretation of God’s law takes precedence over the teaching of the Gospel?

Please don’t let your faith be about the current pope or the current bishop or your pastor or any priest. Please let your faith be about the gift of the Eucharist, God among us, to be in communion with God because of Jesus Christ.

But the Church is also built upon our relationship with each other through our relationship with God. Our faithfulness does not mean we should ignore failings and do nothing about them. This is our Salvation story from the beginning of time; from Moses confronting the Israelites who built the golden calf; to Jesus in the Temple sanctifying it and rejecting it as a marketplace; to Jesus giving up His last breath that we might live. My response to your question to me, ‘*what am I going to do about the latest news stories*’, is an invitation to join me in this blessing of purification.

I join Cardinal DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and my brother bishops to receive the Holy Father’s support to make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier, to advise the lay faithful of credible allegations, and improve procedures for resolving complaints against bishops, including an independent investigation of any allegation. I am confident Pope Francis shares our desire for greater effectiveness and transparency in the matter of disciplining

bishops. I join my brother bishops in renewing our fraternal affection for the Holy Father during these difficult days.

During the Priests' Convocation, I called upon all our priests to observe September as a penitential month and to set aside a penitential day of prayer and fasting during the month of September. If you are willing, I invite you to also observe a penitential day of prayer and fasting this month. My day of prayer and fasting is September 12, the Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Mary. Mary is our 'Advocate.' As such, she has maternal mindfulness of us and is attentive to our needs.

Be holy. The Church is holy. May we set aside disparaging words and conflict and cultivate peace; not the peace as the world understands it, but the Peace which comes from forgiveness, its source from Christ on the Cross.

Prayer of Forgiveness

Heavenly Father,

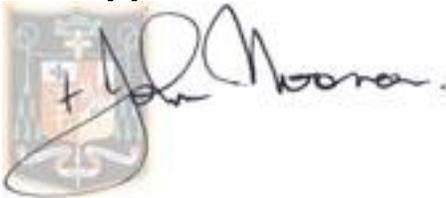
As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Diocese of Orlando, I pray that you stay with us, O Lord. I come before you humbly and I ask forgiveness for the cases of abuse in the Diocese of Orlando, the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience and sexual abuse on the part of representatives of this local Church. We ask forgiveness.

I ask forgiveness for all those times when, as a Church, we did not offer to the victims of any type of abuse compassion and the pursuit of justice and truth by concrete actions. We ask forgiveness.

I ask forgiveness for some members of the hierarchy who took no responsibility for these painful situations and kept silent. We ask forgiveness.

Grant me the strength to be vigilant and safeguard Your holy people. Amen.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A circular seal with a cross and other symbols is partially visible on the left. To its right is a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Noonan".

Most Reverend John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando