

Novena concerning the Sexual Abuse Scandal in the Catholic Church

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Introduction

On August 20, 2018, Pope Francis wrote a letter to the People of God. In his letter, the Pope addressed the fathomable abuse scandal around former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and several dioceses in the state of Pennsylvania (USA). Pope Francis asks the whole People of God to be close to victims in solidarity. He also claims that we are called by God as *His People*. Thus, the wounded body of the Church can only change, if each and every cell is part of this healing process.

“Every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does. [...] To 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. I invite 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.”

In this novena, we want to respond to the Pope's call. United in prayer, we ask God for change – in every one of us, and in his whole Church.

The Nine Days

1. “If one member suffers...”
2. “... everyone will.” (1 Cor 12:26)
3. “Nothing is covered that will not be uncovered.” (Luke 12:2)
4. Clericalism as a Disease
5. Standing Up Courageously
6. With Open Eyes and an Open Mind
7. Healing Together
8. He has Brought down the Powerful from their Thrones
9. Determined Actions

Day 1: „If one member suffers...“

The amount of suffering we face these days is inexpressible: Again, we learn that minors have been sexually abused by priests and bishops.

We read that ecclesiastical superiors shamelessly exploit the trust placed in them. The suffering done to young people and their families is immeasurable and irreparable. All who are affected by it will be shaped by it for a lifetime – right down to their most personal and intimate relationships.

God, I don't know what to say. Stunned, I face the evil that happens through representatives of the Church. I can have an uneasy sense of what will be done to the many people whose trust has been shamefully exploited.

Lord, I realize that these terrible things can not be undone. Hence, I pray that you help all the victims of abuse and that you comfort them in their unfathomable pain. Heal what we can not heal. Therefore I ask in the name of, Jesus Christ, your son, and our brother. Amen.

Day 2: “... everyone will suffer.” (1 Cor 12:26)

The pain of the abuse victims draws wide circles. It spreads fainting, anger, shame and disgust. Especially among those who care about the Church. They feel betrayed by the priests and bishops who hurt others instead of being there for them.

Countless believers get involved in the Catholic Church. They invest time, energy, and passion into a community that offers them a spiritual home. None of us is perfect. But never would they even think about hurting other people in such a sick way – especially not in the name of the Church.

God, it makes me incredibly angry when I imagine what's going on in some people's minds. Those who are supposed to proclaim your message of love, those who are supposed to be “shepherds” to others, they obviously feel to have the right to do anything if they want.

At times, I wonder if and how I still want to belong to this church – so grave is the disgust for the misery caused by some of her representatives. Please help me to understand what all this is – or at least what we can do about it. Amen.

Day 3: “Nothing is covered that will not be uncovered.” (Luke 12:2)

For years, there have been repeated reports that church officials are abusing their position. Obviously there are forces present that want to work in secret. These powers are not from God, who calls his children the “light of the world”.

As painful as the ever-new insights are, we have to face them to dispel the darkness with our light. Even if we wish to deny it, this abuse is real – inside and outside the Church.

Jesus Christ, you have come into the world to give us an idea of how immensely great God's love is. You have come to heal what is wounded – even at the risk of being wounded and killed yourself.

I'd prefer if those terrible things did not exist. But obviously, the world is not what I imagined it to be; not the Church either. In this respect, it is certainly better that it is brought to the open, what has been hushed up so far. Give me the strength to face reality without perishing on it. Amen.

Day 4: Clericalism as a Disease

“Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.” —Pope Francis

Every community needs guidance. Leadership is a service, not a privilege. As baptized Christians, as People of God, we must find a form of leadership in the Church through which individuals can no longer stand above each other.

God, you alone are Lord! You are calling us to be your People: your children. At our baptism we were proclaimed to be priests, kings and prophets. It's wonderful that there are people who dedicate themselves to you in a special way. But that does not make them any better than any and every one of us.

Help us to give up every form of human exaggeration and to find a way to organize your Church that strengthens all of us in our dignity as your children. I ask this through Jesus Christ, our brother and Lord. Amen.

Day 5: Standing Up Courageously

Much of what we learn about the abuse scandal leaves us behind with a feeling of helplessness. We have to act against this powerlessness. For those who let themselves be petty, give in to the forces that made the abuse possible in the first place. In a perfect world, none of this would be necessary. But obviously our world is not perfect. And that's why it takes courage to promote the good.

God is always greater! Greater than anything that can scare us. That's why Jesus could take the cross upon his shoulders. And that's why he calls us to follow him courageously.

God, sometimes I would like to give up and leave everything behind. At the same time I know that it is useless to close our eyes to the suffering.

Thus, I ask you for courage! Give me courage to face anything that frightens me, no matter how hideous it may be. Give me an unshakeable faith that you are greater than all this evil. Make me strong in confrontation with those who harm your message of Comprehensive Love. I ask this through Jesus Christ, who let himself be guided by your will. Amen.

Day 6: With Open Eyes and an Open Mind

To face the reality usually hurts a lot. Because then we see what we would like to hide. The renewed abuse scandal teaches us that we need open eyes and an alert mind – even in the Church.

It's not about putting everyone under a general suspicion. But we must not be naïve either. Just because someone appears in the name of Jesus does not mean that he acts in the name of Jesus. We are all challenged to address things we find strange. Only this way can we avoid future abuse.

God, ever since "Adam and Eve" we have a hard time distinguishing between good and evil. Even today it is not always easy to know whom I can trust. At the same time, I know that I depend on others and that this will remain the case.

I ask for your Holy Spirit that I see and feel when someone comes in the guise of good. Give me clarity that I bravely address all that is against your commandment of love. Let me help in this way to prevent future abuse. Amen.

Day 7: Healing Together

"It is always helpful to remember that in salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in the human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people. Consequently, 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." —Pope Francis

The Church is often times called a "body". She is a wounded body that I care about. Since I am a member of the Church, a part of this body, I need to heal together with the Church.

God, "if one member suffers, everyone will suffer." That includes that we can only heal together. Although I'm personally not guilty for the abuse by some priests and bishops, we all need to change. The situation can only change, if each and every cell of your body is healed. As a Church, we need to work together to uncover and to end the unjust structures.

Thus, I ask you for strength and solidarity to renew the Church in your favor. I ask this prayer through Jesus Christ, from whom all healing comes. Amen.

Day 8: He has Brought down the Powerful from their Thrones

As Mary became more and more aware of her vocation, she sang the "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55). Mary expresses in this prayer that in the end God will bring about the righteousness we all long for so desperately.

Trusting in the promise that God is the master of history and that he tends his People through the times is the great challenge of being a Christian. For our experience often suggests another conclusion. Yet, it's hopelessness and cynicism that rob us of the strength we need to improve the situation.

God, often times your ways seem closed to me a. Nonetheless, I have confidence that you know what you are doing. You are God; you alone. And even if there are forces in this world and in your Church that resist you, no one can take your place; no matter how hard they try.

Lord, do everything to install your justice. Scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and lift up the lowly. Therefore, I ask through Jesus Christ, our brother and Lord. Amen.

Day 9: Determined Action

One thing is for sure: Something has to change! The governance structures in the Church must become transparent and any spiritual exaggeration of ecclesiastical authority must come to an end. How to do that? This question is still open; but something will happen.

We take Pope Francis at his word when he writes: “May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageously to combat them.”

God, the church has to be constantly renewed. Painfully, we are experiencing this fact these days. I ask you along with people around the world that this renewal is happening quickly.

Give us a vision of your church that makes it a community in which your word is lived and passed on. Unite your people so that we resolutely oppose everything that leads us away from you. May your will be done on us and through. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.