



January 7, 2007 - Rebuilding faith, five years on. Op-ed by Cardinal O'Malley
By Seán P. O'Malley | January 7, 2007

THE FEAST of the Epiphany makes fully manifest the joy of the Christmas season. With the Magi and the shepherds, we worship and adore the Christ Child -- the manifestation of God's love for all humanity. Five years ago, as we marked the feast on Jan. 6, 2002, the devastating revelations that Catholic clergy had sexually abused children shook the Archdiocese of Boston and the wider community. The contrast between the feast, which celebrates the light of Christ, and the dark and unremitting truth of clergy sexual abuse seemed, at first, impossible to accept.

But the truth of the abuse had to be confronted. These crimes against children were all the more heinous because they were committed by men who vowed themselves to emulate Christ, and were further enabled by the failure of the Church leadership to respond appropriately.

God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ to lift us out of the darkness of sin. Only with the truth of clergy sexual abuse exposed could we again seek to walk fully in His light.

The Catholic community has worked diligently in recent years to put in place programs and policies to ensure the safety of children. We must, and will, continue our vigilance and improve on these efforts. Nothing less is acceptable. Our responsibility to children and families is paramount. It is our hope and prayer that such protections will be in place in all settings in society where children depend upon the care of adults.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the good and faithful men, women, clergy, and religious of our archdiocese, I again express my most heartfelt apology to all the children and young people, most now adults, who were abused by priests or other representatives of the Church. Your wounded hearts and shattered spirits have a special claim on the Church, the body of Christ. We will forever be sorry for the harm you have suffered and humbly ask your forgiveness.

I also want to say a special word to the families of those who have been sexually abused. You trusted and loved your priests unconditionally. Tragically, that trust was betrayed. Many of you have extended to me the privilege of meeting with you over these past years. I have seen your broken hearts and tear-filled eyes. I have heard you share agonizing stories about your children, some of whom have even taken their own lives. You will always remain in my heart and mind. And, I pray that you will find consolation in the enduring compassion of the Lord.

The impact of the clergy sexual abuse scandal has reached deep into the lives of parishioners and the faith-filled priests who minister to them. They have borne the shame, grief, and confusion of these devastating revelations with heroic faith. For the clergy and parents, in particular, the ability to impart the gift of faith to children has been especially challenging. And, for the broader community, the scandal of clergy sexual abuse has given rise to anger and mistrust.

If there were no hope, we would indeed be despondent. But as we again celebrate the Epiphany, Jesus reminds us that He will be with us always, even in the most difficult moments. The Christ Child, in the arms of Mary, beckons us to draw close to the peace and protection of His holy embrace. In this love the process of healing can both begin and be sustained.

During the course of the past five years, we have learned much due to the generosity of so many who have committed themselves to the rebuilding of the Church. There is much yet to be done to regain confidence and trust. The Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that the Church's mission is to make God's universal love more visible in the manner in which we live out our faith. The star of Bethlehem continues to shine brightly. Together, guided by this light, we will find our way.

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