

[Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; Ps. 54; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37]

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron asked that his letter be read at all Catholic churches during the weekend of September 22-23:

September 21, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

By now you will have learned that our State Attorney General has launched an investigation into the Catholic Church in Michigan in regard to acts of sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and the ways these cases were handled by bishops and others in authority. Once again, I affirm:

The Archdiocese of Detroit welcomes the Attorney General's investigation and is prepared to fully cooperate. We have worked closely with authorities from all six counties within our archdiocese since 2002, when we shared past case files involving clergy misconduct and committed to turning over all new allegations regardless of when the alleged abuse occurred. The Attorney General investigation is the next phase of our commitment to transparency and healing.

We have full confidence in our safe environment policies put in place and carefully followed for more than 15 years. We remain committed to protecting everyone – especially children and vulnerable adults – and therefore look forward to working closely with officials to determine if there is more we can do to accomplish this goal.

As shepherd of our local church in Detroit, I want to offer my most heartfelt apology for the shame I know you must feel that, because of failures in the Church's leadership, we have come to this point. While shame and embarrassment might be an initial reaction, they are not the most important. First and foremost, in the beginning and throughout, we must keep our focus on the healing of the victim-survivors and on our efforts to keep everyone safe in our parishes, schools and all other dimensions of the Church's life. I renew to you my pledge to lead all of us in striving ever more vigorously to achieve these goals.

Most recently, our response to the sexual abuse crisis has led to

establishing new action steps to hold bishops accountable for our own personal behavior and for how we have dealt with cases of abuse. The U.S. Bishops' Conference has already shared some important decisions about this, and I fully endorse them. Further, I will meet soon with all the priests in the archdiocese to discuss further actions we can take to ensure that my pastoral ministry is characterized by integrity, transparency and accountability.

What I have mentioned so far concerns the actions that need to be taken to strengthen the organizational side of our faith-community. While not seeking to skirt the issue of the need for action, as your pastor, I need also to speak to you about the personal, spiritual response to which God the Father calls us in our current situation. I hear him inviting us to renew our faith in him: that he has raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord of history, not least the history of our time and place; that in the death and resurrection of Jesus is the power to conquer evil, even sins as heinous as those being uncovered because of this crisis; and that in the outpouring of his precious blood he gives us the singular grace to atone for these sins and heal the wounds that have been inflicted on Christ's Mystical Body, the Church.

In that light, I ask that you enter into a moment of prayer – kneel if you wish – and in spirit join with the priest in this prayer from the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, which I've edited to focus on our community's need for mercy:

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for the sins of clergy sexual abuse and the failure of those who should have prevented it. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and give healing to all victim-survivors, their families, and to the whole world.

As I close, I offer again my apology, first of all to victim-survivors and all others so grievously wounded by the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, and for these crimes and failure of leaders to prevent them.

Also, I apologize to all of you, members of the Catholic community, for the hurt these sins have caused you. With the help of God, I will continue to lead us on the path toward being the family of faith God calls us to be.

Saint Anne, pray for your Church in Detroit. Blessed Solanus, pray for us.  
Sincerely yours in Christ,  
The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron Archbishop of Detroit

### Homily

In this Sunday's readings, we face wickedness: jealousy destroying what is good, selfishness causing harm to others, and pride squashing those who get in the way. It is a good, providential basis for the Archbishop's letter.

The First Reading covers the evil doings of outsiders who oppressed the Israelite nation. In the Gospel reading, Jesus predicts the evil doings of spiritual outsiders who were fighting against His ministry. The letter of James addresses the worst wickedness of all: the battle within the Church -- Christians against Christians. Jealousy and selfishness are usually the root beneath every scandal in the Church, every division on the parish staff, every discord among ministries, every disappointed volunteer who feels pushed out, every broken relationship in Christian families, and every attitude that chases weaker Catholics away from the faith -- it's all wicked!

To get at the root of any divisive problem, look for self-centered ambition. Honestly and objectively identify even the most subtle forms of it so that you can also identify God's antidote. When you see divisiveness in others, do you feel sorrow for them? If not, why not? The answer to that usually lies in our own self-centered pride. Jesus provided the cure for this: "If anyone wishes to be first" (which is a desire motivated by selfish ambition) "you must become the servant of all." Selfish ambition is sinful because it tries to grab success away from others. James pointed out that whatever we're ambitious for, if it's good, we can have it simply by asking God for it and working in collaboration with the Holy Spirit to achieve our goals -- but not if we want it only to satisfy our personal, selfish passions.

God gives us what we pray for when it will benefit the parish community or the entire family or those we are called to serve in our ministries. When we desire something for the sake of how it will help others (rather than just for our own

benefit), this desire is pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, and full of mercy and will produce good fruits.

When have you suffered from the jealousies and selfish ambitions of others in the Church? How did this affect your faith? Did it motivate you to avoid committing the same sin?

Identify how jealousy and selfish ambition have been the underlying cause behind one problem you've witnessed or personally experienced in the Church. How can these scandals be healed through a pure heart, a peaceful response, gentleness, mercy, and good fruits that turn a tragedy into a triumph?

It won't be easy. People will ridicule us, badger us, and even shame us into not doing what Jesus wants us to do. Look at the figure in today's First Reading. The Suffering Servant will do just that, suffer. But the evil ones who will do the inflicting of pain and suffering let words of truth slip out between their grinding teeth. "The just one is the son of God." "God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes." "We have proof of his gentleness and patience." "God will take care of him."

When Archbishop Allen Vigneron became Archbishop of Detroit in January of 2009, he made clear his mission and message for us: "To share Christ in and through the Church." Nine years later, he challenges us to "Unleash the Gospel" as Christ's joyful, missionary disciples. He also mentioned that this is the only way to genuine and lasting happiness. To do what Jesus Christ came to do. To follow Jesus in carrying our crosses, whatever they may be. To realize that there is more to life than just this life and to work for happiness in eternal life.

This is how we receive Jesus Christ like little children: loving, trusting, serving, and knowing that even if we go beyond our comfort zone for the sake of ministry and service to the community, even if we give from our wallets until it hurts, even if we give God time for prayer, and our family and households the gift of time and love, we do this to Him. We give ourselves to Him. We honor, serve and worship Him. Welcome the message, welcome the messenger, and you will be welcoming God Himself. What better way to be happy than that? AMEN!