

Thy Kingdom Come!



REGNUM CHRISTI

September 15, 2018
Our Lady of Sorrows

To all the Regnum Christi members in the North American Territory

Dear friends,

I just wrote a letter to my Legionary brothers in the North American Territory regarding the current crisis our beloved Church finds herself in. As their major superior I felt the responsibility to provide some guidance and perspective to help them navigate these turbulent times. I feel the same responsibility to now direct myself to you as territorial director for Regnum Christi and to offer my thoughts on our response to all of this. I could never truly express all that is on my heart and mind in a moment like this; however, I do wish to try and express the points that are weighing on me the most.

Learning from our own institutional crisis

These weeks of confusion in the Church remind me of our own spiritual family's crisis that began in 2009. When we heard the gut-wrenching news about our founder many of us felt the ground beneath us give way and we looked for something solid to grasp onto, trying to understand how to react and respond. Meditating on Rembrandt's famous painting [Christ in the Storm](#) helped me enormously at that time and it is now helping me during these tempestuous times. Christ's voice echoes in my heart, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (See Mk 4:40.)

What I have heard most from the many conversations I have had with you is that those of us who have weathered the storm of our institutional crisis and continue on the journey of healing – lay people, consecrated members, and religious alike – find that it was only through love grounded in confident faith in Christ that has kept us afloat. We have found this love and faith forged during almost a decade of working through the facts of our founder's double life, his grave sins, and the destructive consequences of his sins – especially for his victims and their families. Now we are experiencing some of the same pain again as members of the Church. This time we have the grace to understand that through confident faith in Christ we will once again, as a spiritual family and as a Church, weather the storm.

Historical context for this crisis

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We are living a colossal crisis in the Church. History will be the judge, but I venture to say this crisis rises to the proportions of the Protestant Reformation. During that time the Church was flooded with corruption and suffered from deep wounds – inflicted primarily by her own shepherds. Yet those were also the times of Saints Charles Borromeo, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Philip Neri, and many others whose names we do not know. Saints are forged in time of crisis. This is our calling as Catholics, as Regnum Christi members, to renew souls and therefore help renew the Church with a spirit of great humility, faith, and courage. Not because we have it all figured out – because we don't and we are still learning as we continue on our own renewal process – but because of our ardent love for Christ and our Church.

Loyalty to the Holy Father and bishops in communion with him

Loyalty to the Holy Father and our bishops is a core element of our charism. For some of us, this loyalty is being put to the test. We need to remind ourselves what this aspect of our charism consists in; our loyalty and love for the Vicar of Christ and the bishops in communion with him is grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ. We passionately believe that Christ gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom (see Mt. 16:19), and Christ is working through him to lead the Church. “All good shepherds are in the one shepherd” (see St. Augustine, *Sermon 46*, 29-30). Infallibility in doctrine does not necessitate, however, infallibility in tactics. We are allowed to disagree with the steps some bishops and even the Holy Father may be taking. We are allowed to question the prudence of a given course of action. What the offices of authority in the Church demand of us is respect, benefit of the doubt, filial obedience, and an attitude of listening for the voice of the Eternal Shepherd through the voice of the earthly shepherd.

We cannot allow ourselves to fall prey to the divisive categories of the world. We must resist the temptation to throw people into two buckets: liberal or conservative, bad or good. While we are not obliged to take words at face value – especially when trust has been betrayed to such an extreme degree – we must believe that the Shepherd has not abandoned his flock and will work his reform. Belief in Divine Providence must rise above a political, horizontal worldview. Thus we listen to our shepherds with respect and openness, not dismissing out of hand what they may say. All of our actions must be rooted in a humble heart with charity towards all.

The service of authority benefits from the voice of the sheep. We should not be afraid to voice our concerns, even our repugnance at the actions – or inaction – of some bishops. Many bishops themselves have called out their own brothers. But it must be done with a high level of respect and out of a true desire to seek charity in truth. For many the testimony of Archbishop Viganò highlighted issues that reasonably merit a proper

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investigation to arrive to the truth and be sure that victims are cared for and that no one is falsely accused. Love requires speaking the truth and asking for the truth from those we love and honor, and that includes our bishops and our Holy Father. I am hopeful that the statement being prepared by the Holy See will be helpful toward restoring trust, and that the meeting the Holy Father has called with the presidents of the world's episcopal conferences will be fruitful.

Roots of the crisis

It would be a mistake to name one cause of this crisis. We can talk about a culture of secrecy, a culture of clericalism, and a culture of greed. All of those exist or existed, but what has hurt so many so deeply is a culture of sexual immorality. Sins of sexual immorality, and in many cases homosexual immorality, are at the core of this crisis and they have taken a hold in the lives of some priests. This is unacceptable and incompatible with the chastity we priests promise publicly before God and his people on the day of ordination, and for religious priests well before then. Certainly, our human condition is weak and we all can experience temptation and falls in this area. The various transgressions we have heard about go way beyond normal human frailty. In order for this to happen, there must have been the neglect of prayer, the abandonment of faith, the lack of real discernment, and a giving of oneself over to the power of the evil one.

This is the great scandal: The one institution that has stood up against the hedonistic culture of sexual libertinism, fought for the sacredness of the sexual act in marriage, and contradicted the naysayers who claim purity is impossible, is the same institution, the Church, that has so egregiously fallen prey to a culture of objectification of persons and sexual immorality. The voice of the Church fighting against evil has been muffled by the evil within. Of course, by and large most Catholic clergy were not complicit in these vices. Just as in the Legion and the Movement most of us did not have anything to do with our founder's double life. Yet in both cases the sins of a few were so grave we all suffer from them. Nor were we in the Garden of Eden, yet we suffer for that sin too. We are all sinners to some extent and my sins affect the whole mystical Body, which is why we are suffering the effects of these sins so acutely.

What is needed at this time

Living lives of integrity is what is most needed. The world needs witnesses of holiness that inspire them to seek a relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. When I say integrity I mean that who we profess to be and how we behave are one and the same thing. Let us allow these times to be an opportunity for us to examine our lives and ask Jesus how we can grow and deepen in our own Christian life and live it with greater

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fidelity and love. “Be ... children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Philippians 2:15).

We need accountability. This is something we have been intentionally practicing in the Movement since at least 2014. It is one of the core values we strive to live and encourage others to live. We need the laity’s help in this. You could begin by familiarizing yourself with the Legionaries of Christ’s [Code of Conduct](#). Part of what the Church is suffering now is because the lay faithful often gave priests a pass, turning a blind eye to misbehavior and even crimes. We cannot be constantly suspicious of our priests, waiting for them to make a false step. But we also cannot be afraid to call them to a higher standard and to point out behaviors that may lead them astray. We need this from our lay people. That also goes for those in authority. Those of us in positions of authority must be willing to sacrifice being thought well of for the sake of doing right by those under our care. We also need to be willing to accept criticism from our subordinates or from lay people. Critical feedback done in a constructive spirit is essential for good governance. This is living charity in truth. This is being courageous in living in the truth. Once again, though, we must always do this with humility.

Finally, we need a faith like Peter’s. In the midst of a stormy sea, our Lord called him to walk on water – and he did. He made one mistake though; when the winds picked up and the waves grew tall, he stopped looking at Jesus and he looked at himself and his own abilities instead. He said to himself, “I can’t walk on water.” And then he began to drown; yet he never lost hope. He said, “Lord save me!” And at that moment our Lord stretched out his hand and pulled him to safety (see Mt 14:29-31). Let us pray with St. Peter, “Lord save us!”

A final word

Providence had us experience our own crisis beginning nearly ten years before this current one. We were allowed to endure the pain and suffering that come from reform. Pope Benedict XVI thankfully intervened and initiated the purification that was needed in the Legion and also subsequently in Regnum Christi. This purification was needed and we certainly continue to see the need for ongoing renewal and correction as we seek to rebuild our spiritual family. The work is definitely not complete, and yet the merciful Risen Lord is affording us the experience of new life already. We have a responsibility as members of the Church to encourage and even accompany others who may also be struggling. We need to encourage them not to lose hope and to confidently put their faith in Christ. I believe lay Regnum Christi members should reach out to their parish

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priests and local bishops, many of whom are weighed down by all of this and may not have as much support. I also encourage you to reach out to your spiritual directors and talk about these things with them. It will help you get perspective and also be equipped to talk about these issues with others.

I wish I could visit with all of you to discuss and share this with you personally. Obviously, that will not be possible. However, I want to share a bit more with you so I'm including a [link](#) to the video of a homily I gave at the professions in Cheshire a couple weeks ago. I hope you are able to take some time and watch it.

Let's unite ourselves with Mary, the Mother of Sorrows and Mother of the Church whose feast day we celebrate today. Let us adopt the same contemplative spirit as she did in the face of so many tempestuous times in her life, remembering that it is Christ who will calm these turbulent waters. May we remember most importantly the victims and their families suffering during this tragic time. May God grant them the needed care and healing that they so desire and deserve. If anyone has information to share or questions related to possible sexual abuse of minors, please feel free to contact our safe environment coordinator, Fr. Steven Reilly, LC (sreilly@legionaries.org; +1 (301) 580-0340).

Yours in Christ and the Movement,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Connor, LC". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Fr. John Connor, LC
Territorial Director
Regnum Christi and the Legionaries of Christ