



ARCHDIOCESE OF HALIFAX

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October 2, 2009

To the Roman Catholic Faithful of Nova Scotia,

Greetings and peace.

In the past days, I have been asked over and over again: What do you say to the parishioners, to the priests, the young people and to the faithful communities that make up our Church in Nova Scotia? What will you say to the victims of sexual abuse, as we all struggle in the aftermath of unbelievable revelations and allegations of even more unacceptable shocking and possible criminal sexual behaviour?

What I want to say is: Enough is enough! How much more can all of us take? Like you, my heart is broken, my mind is confused, my body hurts and I have moved in and out of a variety of feelings especially shame and frustration, fear and disappointment, along with a sense of vulnerability, and a tremendous poverty of spirit. I have cried and I have silently screamed, and perhaps that was my prayer to God: Why Lord? What does all this mean? What are you asking of me and of my priests? What do you want to see happen among your people? Is this a time of purification or is it nothing more than devastation? Are people going to stop believing, will faithful people stop being people of faith? Lord, what are you asking of us and how can we make it happen?

The questions running through my mind are many and it was in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Sydney River, where I met privately with Ron Martin, that the Word of God, hanging on a tapestry, said to me, "Be still and know that I am God". It is this word which I pray all can receive and reflect upon, a word which calms us down in the storm and refocuses our attention, not on failure, disgrace, disappointment and anger – but on the reality of God experienced, if and when we can stop and be still.

It has occurred to me that in these past few days many of us are experiencing the reality and the full implication of the mystery of our faith. We are personally going through the passion and the death which Christ experienced, but we have not yet gone beyond death to the resurrection. It is as if we are presently sealed up in a dark tomb waiting for the power of the Spirit of God to overtake us and raise us up to a new day and a new future.

It is this Spirit of God, this Holy Spirit, which we must open our hearts to receive – for only the Holy Spirit can drive out the un-holy spirits with which so many have become obsessed.

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Our faith in Jesus Christ is a response from the heart – a heart which has known the healing grace of mercy and forgiveness. At this time when so many hearts have been broken, we need to know again or for the first time, the healing grace of God's love. Such healing grace can only come from all of us sharing together our faith and convictions that, in spite of sin in all its forms, mercy is stronger than anger, forgiveness is more powerful than rejection and reconciliation is more transformative of spiritual devastation into new life possibilities.

Because we still are people of faith – let those who can, come together to continue to proclaim the love of Christ. May we find in our faith the foundation upon which our Church can be re-founded, not to be a perfect society reserved only for the pure, but an assembly of forgiven and resurrected human beings animated by healed and Eucharistic hearts.

If our church is to get beyond our present difficulties, if we hope to have any significant future, we must learn the lessons which these last years of struggle point to. One of these lessons is for all of us to have a better understanding of what constitutes a human person. People, priests, bishops are human, and failure to see, recognize and care about this will continue to produce inhuman expectations and give rise to inhuman behaviour. Another lesson is that failure in pastoral leadership is also connected to a misunderstanding of the diverse relationships which are needed to hold together the community of faith. Bishops, priests, deacons and lay ministers are not superheroes; leadership among the people of God is not about power, it is about caring.

There are many areas that we must attend to in order to move forward. Some are immediate, others will take more time. Together, let us face the present crisis; let us find the heart needed to slowly reconstruct our relationships and our capacity to trust and to care.

It starts by being still before God and slowly reaches out to another person with love and acceptance. May the God of stillness and the Spirit of life bless all of us and may the person of Jesus Christ be the foundation of our lives.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Mancini', with a stylized, cursive script.

Anthony Mancini
Archbishop of Halifax,
Apostolic Administrator of Yarmouth and
Apostolic Administrator of Antigonish