



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

August 30, 2018

Dear Brother Priest,

I very much look forward to our time together on Labor Day, first in prayer and then in conversation. With all the disconcerting news and terrible revelations that have happened, and with such rapidity, I recognize that I have not been as close to you as I need to be to help you and me minister to the people we both love and serve.

Last Sunday at the Cathedral of Saint Matthew the Apostle, as so many of you did in your own parish church, I offered Holy Mass – a Liturgy focused on the spiritual context for so much of the pain, suffering, darkness and disillusionment brought on by the sexual abuse of children and young people by priests and its cover-up by bishops. Whatever our response to this spiritual crisis, it has to begin at the altar – and in prayer.

As so many of you did, we prayed first for the survivors – those who bear the scars of abuse. On too many occasions over these past three decades as a bishop, I have sat with survivors and their families to listen, to try to be present, to pray and often simply to cry together.

At the Cathedral, as I am sure you did, we also prayed for the whole Church – the Body of Christ – wounded by the shame and horror of these egregious actions. It is our people who also bear a deep hurt because they love their Church and do not know what is coming next. Thank you for being there with them, even when there is so little to say, other than prayer. Your, and I hope my own, ministry is the beginning of some healing.

My prayers and what I asked of those at Mass are also for you. Each priest – all of us – somehow bears the joys and sorrows of one another because we are all rightly seen as sharers in the priesthood. Your ministry is a precious gift to those you serve – to the Body of Christ. I want you to know my desire – even if I have not well expressed it – to be close to you. In the rush to get information to you, I failed to share fully with you my spiritual and fraternal care and offer you and our faithful people a strong sign of pastoral leadership. I hope this effort today and our Labor Day gathering will clearly show my great appreciation, not to say affection, for all of you, my brother priests and the recognition of your efforts to be pastorally present to our people in their struggles.

I ask you, as I did at the Cathedral, for prayers for me, for forgiveness for my errors in judgment, for my inadequacies, and also for your acceptance of my contrition for any suffering I have caused, as well as the grace to find, with you, ways of healing, ways of offering fruitful guidance in this darkness.

This Sunday in our churches all across this great archdiocese, I ask you please to let your people – the men, women and children – we love and minister to and hold in our pastoral care know that I do recognize and share their pain. Let them know I wish I could wipe it away even though that is simply not possible. I would give anything, as would all of us, to turn the clock around and have the Church do everything right. But I do join them in sorrow for all that has happened. I plead for their prayerful support as I with you and them try to do whatever I can to help move this Church closer to the pathway that leads us from this darkness.

At the Mass this Sunday that I shall celebrate, I hope to offer some thoughts on how we as a Church – all of us laity, religious and clergy – might begin with faith strengthened in prayer to discern that level of reform rooted in accountability and transparency that would permit the Church to enter a new era.

Finally, we need to hold close in our prayers and loyalty our Holy Father, Pope Francis. Increasingly, it is clear that he is the object of concentrated attack. At each Mass we pray for him by name. As we do so with our voices may we do so as well with our hearts.

Dear brother in the Lord, I hope you will sense something of my anguish for those who have suffered and my sorrow for any of my failures to be there for both the abused and all who now feel a sense of alienation. In my heart, I now ask myself what is the way I can best serve this Church, that I too much love.

Would you please let the faithful you serve know of my love, my commitment to do whatever is necessary to right what is wrong, and my sincere solidarity with you and them.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald Cheadle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Archbishop of Washington