

Homily for Sunday October 7th 2018

In this week's newsletter I have written about a request from the Pope, asking Catholics around the world to pray especially during this month of October for the Church. He has suggested two particular prayers.

The first is an ancient prayer to Our Lady, dating back to the third century.

We fly to your protection O Holy Mother of God.

Do not ignore our prayers in our time of need,

but from every danger free us always,

O glorious, O blessed Virgin.

The second prayer will be familiar to many, the prayer to St Michael.

The text of both prayers is in the newsletter. The Pope asks us to make them part of our daily prayer, along with the Rosary.

The Church is certainly in need of prayer at this time. We are all too aware of the crisis of abuse in various countries around the world. As I said on a previous occasion, and wrote in the newsletter, we are talking about grave sin and serious crime. What appears to have been a systematic cover up of abuse is no less sinful and criminal.

This situation is a challenge to the authorities of the Church to take effective action so that, as far as is humanly possible, such things never happen again.

Prayer is not an alternative to action. We absolutely need both. There is no simple solution but there are steps that can and must be taken to protect children and vulnerable adults.

What then of the Pope's appeal for prayer? It is absolutely necessary, indeed essential. What is needed is nothing less than a conversion of minds and hearts. We often speak of the renewal of the Church, but we often fail to grasp what that means. Renewal is often interpreted as "making changes". Changes are certainly needed but changing structures is not enough by itself.

What is needed is a deeper faith, and a recognition that Christ is calling each of us to draw closer to him, and to change our lives.

I ask myself how men who have dedicated their lives to Christ could possibly do the terrible things that have been done.

I have no doubt that the Devil has been very active in leading men to sin, but he would not succeed unless they had already drifted away from Christ. Someone who spends time every day in prayer could never do such things. If a priest ceases to put Christ at the centre of his life he becomes an empty vessel.

We need as priests to make time every day to be with the Lord. Your prayers can help us to do that.

All is not dark in the Church. The Holy Spirit is active in many places and is inspiring new life in so many ways. There must be changes in the Church, and no doubt there will be, but genuine renewal must go much deeper than that.

You and I need to ask ourselves some very basic questions. What does my faith really mean to me?

How much time do I give to God each day?

Is being a Catholic a kind of hobby for Sundays?

Please take up the Pope's request. Pray for the Church. Pray for priests. Pray for the Pope and the Bishops. But pray also that the Holy Spirit will inspire each of us, clergy and laity alike to respond to the urgent need of conversion.

The call is to each one of us, and it is urgent.