

Editorial: 'Long Lent' continues

It's been more than 16 years since the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the United States erupted, yet the Church continues to reel from the brutal consequences of this contemptible cancer.

This time, it took down someone at the top. Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick – most recently archbishop of Washington, after 60 years as a priest, 40 as a bishop and 17 as a cardinal – has been suspended from ministry after an allegation of abuse of a minor were found to be substantiated and credible. It was also revealed that Cardinal McCarrick faced allegations of sexual misconduct with three adults; two of those allegations resulted in settlements.

When the clergy sexual abuse crisis hit in early 2002, some dubbed it Catholicism's "Long Lent." Allegations of abuse seemed continuous. By now we know that our Long Lent still torments us.

The dramatic, public fall of Cardinal McCarrick, well-known for his attention to the poor, for his philanthropic activity, for growing vocations and for a particularly assertive concern for social issues, is a piercing wound to the Church in America.

"While I have absolutely no recollection of this reported abuse, and believe in my innocence, I am sorry for the pain the person who brought the charges has gone through, as well as for the scandal such charges cause our people," Cardinal McCarrick said in a statement.

It is important to say, up front, that the Church can never apologize enough for the horrific crimes of clergy sexual abuse. There is no excuse, no justification. The damage done

to the lives of the victims is grievous, and we urge those who have been victimized to report the abuse to the proper authorities, and to turn to Jesus Christ for the peace and reconciliation that can only be found through him. Our prayers are with you. As an institution, the Church must continue to work constantly and comprehensively to protect our children.

For many Catholics, the news of Cardinal McCarrick renews confusion and frustration with the Church. Some may be experiencing a crisis of faith, and some may be considering leaving the Church altogether. These feelings of disillusionment are understandable. At times such as these, it may be of help to remember that the Church is made up of human beings and, as such, is flawed by sin. That does not mean that those within the Church who commit horrific crimes and who abuse power are excused; they cannot be. But it does mean the Church, as other institutions and communities, is vulnerable to the work of the devil.

But because the Church is made up of human beings, it also means that we have the power to work for good. Throughout history, some of the Church's most majestic moments have come when its people have helped to raise it up from the ashes. God's grace is there waiting for us, helping us positively to build up the Church and society as a whole. This is a challenge, but also a blessing. We must witness more openly to the Gospel. We must proclaim Christ's love more boldly. We cannot allow abusers who derail the mission of the Church to have the last word. All of us, as members of the Body of Christ, must project Christ's light amid a world dark with sin.

Clerical sexual abuse of minors is an appalling reality that inevitably results in much suffering and pain. The miracle of Christianity, however, is that, through suffering and with God's grace, those who love the Lord can bring the perfection of his love into the world.

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