



Association of U.S. Catholic Priests

National Assembly, Chicago, June 27-30, 2016

VESPERS OF HOPE

Based on a service originally organized in 2002 by the Diocese of Oakland. Adapted by Bernard R. Bonnot, Robert Cushing, Lawrence Dowling, and James Kiesel of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and Donna B. Doucette of Voice of the Faithful.

Opening Hymn: Earthen Vessels (by St. Louis Jesuits)

*We hold a treasure
Not made of gold
In earthen vessels, wealth untold,
One treasure only, the Lord, the Christ,
In earthen vessels.
Light has shown in our darkness.
God has shown in our hearts
With the light of the glory
Of Jesus the Lord.
He has chosen the lowly
Who are small in this world
In his weakness His glory
In Jesus the Lord.*

Welcome, Call to Lamentation, Contrition and Hope (Bob Cushing)

Opening Prayer

Jeremiah 14: 17-21 (Donna Doucette)

I said, "Ah, Lord God, the prophets say to the people, 'You shall not see the sword; famine shall not befall you. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.'"

The Lord said to me, "These prophets utter lies in my name. ..."

Therefore thus says the Lord:

"Concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name, though I did not send them, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not befall this land':

By sword and famine shall these prophets meet their end.

The people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of famine and the sword. No one shall bury them, their wives, their sons, or their daughters, for I will pour out upon them their own wickedness. Speak to them this word:

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'Let my eyes stream with tears night and day, without rest,
over the great destruction which overwhelms the virgin daughter of my people,
over her incurable wound.

'If I walk out into the field, look! Those slain by the sword. If I enter the city, look!
Victims of famine.

Both prophet and priest ply their trade in a land they do not know.

'Have you really cast Judah off?

Is Zion loathsome to you?

Why have you struck us a blow that cannot be healed?

We wait for peace, to no avail;

for a time of healing, but terror comes instead.

We recognize our wickedness, Lord, the guilt of our ancestors:
we have sinned against you.

Do not reject us, for your name's sake;

Do not disgrace your glorious throne.

Remember! Do not break your covenant with us.' "

THE WORD OF THE LORD.

Call & Response

Narrator:

In their childhood and youth, victims and survivors of clerical sexual abuse reached out to the Church, or were brought to her, trusting that they would have an experience of God's love through an encounter with Jesus in the priests and other leaders of the Church. Lamentably their innocence was stolen. They were overwhelmed by the horror of what happened to them. As adults, when they reported what happened, they and their families were ignored; their pain, anger and fear were dismissed. When they withdrew, we and others in the church left them alone, isolated.

Priests:

All: Like too many in the Church,
we priests through ignorance or shame
did not face the horrible truth about abuse
within our church, within our brotherhood of priests.

Side 1: We were called to serve
but failed to grasp
the devastating impact
of abuse on the lives of so many.

Side 2: Even with the signs before us—
when rumors circulated among our ranks
or brother priests suddenly disappeared

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or media blared the news—
we chose not to believe.

All: We embraced denial.

We had eyes but we did not see.

We had ears but we did not hear.

Side 1: We did not adequately minister God's saving grace to the abused.

Side 2: Our eyes had been blinded,
our ears made deaf,
and our will paralyzed by our shame and fear.

All: We pray for God's mercy and forgiveness
and ask for the grace to amend our priestly lives.

Narrator:

Victims and survivors came back to the church, seeking healing, but they were hurt again.

Priests:

All: Like too many in the Church, from the top down,
we preferred comfort rather than health, illusion rather than truth.

Side 1: We protected our brother priests, defended our bishops.
We did not accept the challenge of ministering to those
whose hearts, souls, spirits, and lives
had been shattered by the abuses of priests and other ministers of the gospel.

Side 2: We did not accept the challenge of helping
those whose emotion and pain were more than we could bear.

All: We chose the easier road. We left the problems to someone else.
With contrite hearts, we pray for God's mercy and forgiveness,
and we ask for the grace to amend our priestly lives.

Narrator:

Victims and survivors came to the church seeking justice, and they were treated as enemies of the church. They sought understanding, honesty, openness, and a commitment to work together to make the church a more just and life-giving place, but they were met by fear, lies, secrecy, and pressure. They were told to keep the horrible things that happened to them secret.

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Priests:

All: We have too often ignored or excused injustices perpetrated by our brother priests and other ministers of the gospel.

Side 1: To our shame, too many of us allowed the victims and their families to bear the pain of this injustice.

We did not lift our voices to support them in their struggles.

Side 2: We are praying for God's mercy and forgiveness and we ask for the grace to amend our priestly lives.

All: May God give us all the grace, courage, and strength we need now to more fully embrace the spirit of lamentation, contrition, and hope.

Narrator:

But what are the hopes of the victims and survivors?

That we would lament, apologize, ask forgiveness,

That we would act to heal and reconcile the pain and alienation that they have experienced.

They continue to hope that we priests and others will share their hope.

Their hope is that we will pray and act:

- By participating in the healing process of all who have been abused by priests, religious or others,
- With the church as a whole responding to this "incurable wound,"
- As we commit ourselves to respond to people's pain, concern, or ignorance about sexual abuse.

Brothers, can we? Will we? Let us consider.

The Homily (Larry Dowling)

Silence

Bring Him (from *Les Miserables*)

God on high

Hear my prayer.

In my need

You have always been there.

He is young,

He's afraid,

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*Let him rest
Heaven blessed.
Bring him home.
Bring him home.
Bring him home.*

*He's like the son I might have known
If God had granted me a son.
The summers die
One by one,
How soon they fly
On and on,
And I am old
And will be gone.*

*Bring him peace,
Bring him joy,
He is young,
He is only a boy.*

*You can take,
You can give,
Let him be,
Let him live.
If I die, let me die,
Let him live.
Bring him home.
Bring him home.
Bring him home.*

Prayers of the Faithful

One Leadership Team Priest's Voice:

On behalf of all priests here gathered and of all members of our Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, we thank the victims and survivors who have come forward to enter into dialogue with us priests and other ministers of the gospel. We thank them for calling us to a deeper understanding and honesty, openness, and commitment to work for justice and healing around this issue of sexual abuse in the church.

Another Leadership Team Priest's Voice:

May our Vespers of Hope this day challenge and enrich us, and all priests everywhere, as well as those who work with us in our various ministries.

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Presider:

Whatever we priests do here today is, at best, a too-long delayed entry into a process of healing and reconciliation. Clearly, our thoughts and prayers today are not a culmination. Victims and survivors long ago committed themselves to speaking the truth of their experiences in hope of healing for themselves, for all who have been abused, for the church, and for the effective protection of future generations of children and all persons. Their initiative and courage invite us to pray now and to commit ourselves to act justly.

Let us dare to lament and repent, to hope and to pray ...

From exploitation and sexual abuse,	deliver us, O God!
From harassment and deception,	deliver us, O God!
From arrogance and hardness of heart,	deliver us, O God!
From alienation and injustice,	deliver us, O God!
From incurable wounds and unhealed hurts,	deliver us, O God!
From betrayal and rejection,	deliver us, O God!

O Holy Mystery, as a tender Father and a forgiving Mother, you help us repent, to change and amend our lives, so that we may more worthily minister your gospel. We beg you to forgive us our sins:

For refusing to face the truth,	forgive us, O God!
For breaking the trust of our people,	forgive us, O God!
For not hearing the cries of the afflicted,	forgive us, O God!
For closing the door on the truth,	forgive us, O God!
For causing the innocent to despair,	forgive us, O God!
For choosing our own comfort instead of service,	forgive us, O God!
For shaming the victims of sexual abuse,	forgive us, O God!
For not caring for the souls entrusted to us,	forgive us, O God!

O God of mercy, we here and now turn again to You, to commit ourselves anew, to act and to pray for the healing of victims. Awaken us to this Kairos moment of care and empower us to actively participate in their healing journey, as we pray:

- For the healing of those sexually abused, exploited, or harassed within the Church, **God of Mercy, empower us!**
- For our own healing and guidance, **God of Mercy, empower us!**
- For the healing of of any who were wrongly accused, **God of Mercy, empower us!**
- For strength to bring abusers to justice, **God of Mercy, empower us!**
- For the wisdom to prevent them from doing further harm, **God of Mercy, empower us!**

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- For the healing of our faith communities and the entire church, **God of Mercy, empower us!**

Gracious God of mercy, as we try to respond with your grace to the pains of those abused, as we attempt to find ways to share their journeys, grant that we may seek justice together and continue in the repentance that brings hope.

Now we move forward from lamenting the past to continue to embrace your truth as You unfold the future to us in hope, we pray ...

Response: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

Grant that we be the holy Church that You desire,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

Help us build safe environments to respect and protect ALL your children in their wonderful diversity, we pray,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

May Your Church empower leadership in both women and men, laity and clergy, we pray,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

May we be a Church reconciled and reconciling with its many unhealed wounds, we pray,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

May Your Church cultivate sacred sexuality, respecting the awesome diversity You have given us,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

May we be companions on the way of your pilgrim Church, openly seeking your wisdom in dialogue,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

May we be your One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, witnessing a new creation, we pray,

R: God ever faithful, God ever merciful, hear our prayer.

God of all compassion, thank you for giving us the sacred wounds of the Crucified and Risen One as the way to follow, as you call a renewed church into being. Give us courage to be tamed by your compassion, knowledge to be named as sister and brother to our Savior, and wisdom to be claimed by your Spirit, as we live out these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our brother.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Closing Commissioning

Presider (Bob Cushing):

My brother priests and all other sisters and brothers present: the healing, reconciling and restoring Spirit of God calls us in this Kairos moment in the Jubilee Year of Mercy to hear a paraphrase of the words that Jesus chose when he went home to Nazareth to begin his ministry.

[Quiet music in background]

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to announce release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are afflicted, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

This “year of favor” is the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The waters of Baptism are the original jubilee, revealing the utter abundance of God’s unconditional love, so today we are open to that reconciling power that will wash away any hesitation to address the needs of victims of child and youth sexual abuse. May this water which we bless [“in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”] send us forth to reconcile with those who have been abused in tears of remorse, tears of empathy, and to invite the full sharing of their pain and healing.

We are commissioned to go forth and wash away the stigma in our society that prevents anyone who was abused by a trusted adult from coming forward to receive healing.

We commit ourselves to go forth and immerse our children and youth in the graces and actions that will assure their safety as they seek to pursue and achieve their God-given potential.

At this time, we invite a representative from each of the tables to come forward to receive a vessel with holy water. As we bless one another with the waters of baptism at each of our tables let us, in silence, make these commitments to God and to each other.

[Music continues during blessings.]

We thank you, my brothers and all gathered with us today, for your commitment to Jesus Christ and to the communities and people who Christ has given you to guide. Let us hold each other in prayer.

Blessing

May the blessing of God be upon you, the blessing of the Father and the Son, and may the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love, be with you all your days. **AMEN.**

Let us offer one another some sign of the Peace of Christ.

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Closing Hymn: We Are Called (David Haas)

*Verse 1: Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!
We are called to be light for the kingdom,
To live in the freedom of the city of God!*

*Refrain: We are called to act with justice.
We are called to love tenderly.
We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.*

*Verse 2: Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy to all those in fear!
We are called to hope for the hopeless,
So all hatred and blindness will be no more!*