

*Homily: Apology Service*  
*St. Raymond, Dublin*  
*28 March 2006*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our gathering tonight is the culmination of the series of 20 Apology Services at which we have prayed with one another in parishes through out our Diocese. In considering whether or not we should have come together for this Service tonight, there may, once again, have been sounding in the corner of the mind of one or another of us a little voice that whispered: “Stay home; don’t go. Why reopen the wounds another time? Why turn our attention once more to acts that are so reprehensible?” A voice that offered a *seeming* wisdom: “No good can be accomplished in reliving the shame yet again.”

If we need a wisdom greater than our own personal insight to refute these objections – to see that their “wisdom” is not really wise – we have the voice of our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. Almost a decade ago, in calling the members of the Church to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he wrote:

“It is appropriate that, as the Second Millennium of Christianity draws to a close, the Church should become more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times... when they departed from the Spirit of Christ and His Gospel and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal” (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 33).

Characterizing the acknowledgment of past failings as “an act of honesty and courage,” the Holy Father went on in the years leading up to the Jubilee to speak honestly and courageously about the sinful acts whereby some of Christ’s disciples had brought evil rather than good into our world.

#### I.

Therefore, standing in spirit along side our late Holy Father, I am here with you to acknowledge past failings, to confess to actions that have hidden the witness of holiness which is required of our community, actions that have caused grave scandal.

And I begin at the heart of the matter. I, as the Bishop of Oakland, apologize with all my heart for the acts of clergy sexual abuse perpetrated upon children and young people in this Diocese. I confess that they have violated Our Lord’s injunction against scandalizing the little ones – an injunction whose implacable gravity Christ underscores by saying that, for him who breaks this command, “it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt. 18:6). I beg pardon from all who have been hurt by these acts of abuse. And I renew my commitment and the commitment of the whole Diocese that we will faithfully implement the provisions of the Dallas Charter to ensure that our children and young people are safe.

Walking again the path marked out by Bishop John Cummins, I first of all renew the apology to victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse. I apologize for the acts of your abusers; and -- making my own the words of Bishop Cummins at the Reconciliation and Healing Service of March, 2000 -- I apologize for the failure to act on the part of “many of the leaders of the Catholic Church [in order] to confront this abuse head-on, to inform themselves of the deeper issues involved in sexual abuse, to remove priest abusers and other employees from active ministry, or to take the side of the victims” (25 March 2000). Here, tonight, once again I acknowledge the great harm done to you, and for that harm I ask pardon.

Because the hurt caused to one member of the Body is a hurt inflicted on all, I want to apologize and ask pardon of all who, while not victim-survivors themselves, have been so grievously affected by clergy sexual abuse. I begin by expressing my profound regret to the families of victim survivors. As the Head of this Local Church, I apologize to the members of the Church as well as to our neighbors in the civic community for the acts of abuse which have done such damage to our communities. As the principal priest of the Church in Oakland I apologize to the Presbyterate of Oakland, because these awful acts of some of our brothers have cast a blighting shadow over the devoted and exemplary ministry of the many.

I apologize to and ask pardon of the Community of the Oakland Diocese for the acts of clerical sexual abuse of minors that occurred in our midst. In particular I come to this church tonight to apologize for the betrayal of your trust by those parish priests of the Oakland Diocese who were abusers. Further, I apologize for the betrayal of your trust by priests and brothers who were not part of the Oakland clergy but who served in the Oakland Diocese and were abusers. And I apologize for the betrayal of trust that took place in other dioceses, where members of this Diocese were abused.

I apologize to all the parishioners who were abused, many of whose names we may not know, and to those we do. I am deeply, deeply sorry. And I apologize to their families. For all of the harm done in our parishes and to our parishes I ask your pardon. And in asking pardon I offer my support for victim-survivors who continue to find it too difficult to come forward to seek help. On behalf of the Catholic community, I affirm that the shame you feel belongs elsewhere, on the shoulders of the abuser. I assure you of the love and support of the Church.

As the Great Jubilee drew close, Pope John Paul II confessed that the path of apology and pardon along which he wanted to lead the Church could “seem contrary to human logic” (*Message for the XXX World Day of Peace, 1997*, 1). Nevertheless, he points out that the seeking and giving of forgiveness which is at the heart of every act of apology find their inspiration in “the logic of love, that love which God has for every man and woman, for every people and nation, and for the whole human family. If the Church dares,” he says, “to proclaim what, from a human standpoint might appear to be sheer folly, it is precisely because of her unshakable confidence in the infinite love of God” (*ibid.*).

Tonight I offer my apologies and ask for pardon under the fullest sign of “the infinite love of God.” I stand and speak under the cross.

Here we see the Eternal Son of God become now the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world. Here we see God's Son, now incarnate, become God's Servant, his Suffering Servant, who on Calvary bore our guilt (cf. Is. 53:4), was pierced for our offenses (cf. Is. 53:5), brought us healing by his stripes (cf. *ibid.*), and gave his life as an offering for sin (cf. Is. 53: 12). It is within the logic of this love, this crucified love, the love of the pierced Heart of Jesus Christ, that our coming together for this Apology Service has its sense, its meaning.

Yes, even according to plain human reckoning we see a reason for expressing regret and searching for that healing which comes from an apology accepted. But, when confronted, as we are, with wrongs so great as the taking of children's innocence by the very ones responsible for guarding that innocence, such mere human logic comes close to collapsing.

And so, we think and act and speak here with a new logic, the logic of Christ's cross. Here our Savior freely offers us the grace of his Spirit, shares with us the strength of his own infinite love. Thus, we can face up to the sins that some of our pastors committed against their flock, indeed against the very lambs of their flock. In the light of the cross, in its promise of victory over evil, I am free to speak, to say I am sorry; and in the power of his crucified love it is possible to forgive – no, not to forget, but to forgive and move toward healing. It is in Christ crucified that the Heavenly Father offers us the balm to bind up this wound.

The record of clerical sexual abuse of children and young people is a heavy burden – a burden for all Catholics in the United States, a burden for the Church in Oakland, and surely a great burden for all who have been directly involved in that history. These sins have brought great pain and worked great damage. It is precisely to the hearts of those who are so burdened that Christ speaks from his Heart tonight: “Come to me. Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28). To his gentle and humble Heart Christ invites us. To his open Heart, wounded for us, he calls us, so that there our souls, all deeply burdened souls, will find rest (cf. Mt. 11: 29).