

## Renewal Amid Crisis of Trust

*(This column from Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D. appeared in The Record on September 6, 2018.)*

In 2007, August 15<sup>th</sup> was a muggy day, and so many gathered for the Mass of Installation as I began serving as Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Louisville. I recall taking up the theme of unity in Christ in truth and charity for my installation homily.

During these very difficult days for our church, with all the revelations of the violations of trust and power by Church leaders, it is important to reflect upon our fundamental unity as the Body of Christ. Only by facing the truth squarely, always inspired by the Holy Spirit and with the love and charity of Christ, can we confront and address the problems we face.

In my homily at this year's ordination, I spoke of the need for the five newly ordained to be witnesses to Christ in the midst of turbulence. I quoted from a recent book by Nancy Koehn, "Forged in Crisis," a story of the making of five courageous persons – described on the book cover as five gritty leaders whose extraordinary passion and perseverance changed history.

These stories from Abraham Lincoln to Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Ernest Shackleton and Rachel Carson relate how courageous persons are more shaped than born. Their qualities, so needed today, emerged from their reactions to crisis. Inspired by these stories, I shared this advice with the newly ordained: "Go into the midst of the people whom you serve. It can be untidy and messy, but God is with you. Be tough and holy. Be gentle in your care but firm in your convictions." All of us called to lead today can benefit from this advice.

I will go to Washington, D.C. in a week for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Administrative Committee meeting at which the agenda for the November Bishops' meeting will be set. At this meeting, I expect we will make plans to take action, beginning with the three-point plan set forth by Cardinal DiNardo and the Executive Committee of the USCCB. This plan includes a call for an independent review of events surrounding Archbishop McCarrick, clear paths to report misconduct or abuse by bishops and advocacy and assurances for better procedures to resolve complaints against bishops.

I note one quality that the heroes in "Forged in Crisis" seemed to have in common. In the face of fearful and even terrifying situations, each had the capacity to remain calm. In a fire, the calm voice is heeded. We need righteous indignation at the news that has come to light rather than irrational rage. While such rage might point to the clear need to act, it will be the calm and decisive voice – inspired by the grace of Jesus Christ – that will slowly but surely rebuild trust.

At a recent meeting of Priests' Council to plan the year's activities and priorities, one pastor rightly pointed to a phrase in my letter to parishioners that addressed this crisis of trust surrounding abuse. He questioned the use of "our" in "our church" and reminded all of us at the meeting that the Church belongs to Christ, and so we belong to Him. Surely when it comes to accountability, we need to take responsibility and pursue decisive action, but in the end, I must never forget that humbly I serve, as you do, the Church that belongs to Christ.

#### PRIEST TALENT NIGHT

In the midst of all the necessary steps to address this crisis of trust, a needed light of relief emerged from our local "Priest Talent Show" a few Friday evenings ago. The National Pastoral Musicians sponsored it as a fundraiser, and I thank Martha Richardson and all who planned and produced this evening. The creativity from the art produced by priests to the great variety of songs sung – some in sing-along fashion – provided much needed relaxation and respite.

I recall one episode from "Forged in Crisis" – an episode that is now a century old. It took place during the expedition to the Antarctic during which Ernest Shackleton led his crew over the vast wasteland after their ship had capsized. The author made the point that the leader knew when rest was needed to maintain clear focus for the task ahead. Thanks for that Friday night respite as we seek to address the difficult tasks ahead. Thanks to the many faithful priests, deacons, religious and lay leaders who labor so tirelessly and faithfully. Thanks, too, for your prayers for me as I seek to follow Christ with you in truth and in charity.