



September 14, 2018  
Feast of the Holy Cross  
Prot. No. 0000 138/2018

*“I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me;  
insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God  
who has loved me and given himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:19b-20)*

Dear Confreres,

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross, we remember the first Novena that St. Alphonsus preached in Scala, from September 6 – 14, 1730, in honour of the Holy Cross venerated in the cathedral of that city. This Novena strengthened his conviction about his vocation to preach the Good News to the abandoned poor. He offered himself to be crucified with his Redeemer so that Christ’s life might be made manifest in him and the *Copiosa Redemptio* more freely available to others.

Perhaps this message is more important to us than ever this year as we celebrate the Holy Cross. For this reason, I have decided to write specifically and directly to you as my beloved brothers, professed together in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

My brothers, so many confreres have spoken to me in recent weeks of their discouragement and disillusionment in the light of the recent revelations and scandals, both the abuse and the coverup, and now the overt and public attacks on Pope Francis. Many of you have asked me: “Is the Institutional Church beyond Redemption? Why do we stay, and how can we continue to preach Good News when this bad news is all around us? When and how will this scandal end?” Certainly, in the north and west, we have seen our Churches empty, our people lose faith and trust, and young people give up. And now this crisis seems to be growing in the south and east, and we are no longer surprised by situations such as Chile and Peru.

Like so many of you, I have struggled personally with these revelations, and with personal feelings of discouragement and rage, disillusionment and shame, betrayal and defensiveness. As unjust as it may be, through the actions of a few, we are all of us labeled and mistrusted by society and by the media, and we suffer for it. Although I do not have answers to all the questions, and I do not know when we will rise above this current dilemma with sufficient safeguards and protections to ensure this never happens again, I do know that we have to face this together. And I am convinced that Pope Francis has offered us a path forward in his *Letter to the People of God*, which I sent to all of you on August 27, 2018.

As vitally important as it is to put an end to the abuse and the coverups, and to ensure that the Church is a place of safety where all are welcome and protected, this is not enough. As Pope Francis urges: *“Together with those efforts, every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does... This can awaken our conscience and arouse our solidarity and commitment to a culture of care that says ‘never again’ to every form of abuse.”*



What is demanded of us today is radical and fundamental *structural change*. The Church needs to change, not just to eliminate the ‘evildoers’ from our midst. The Congregation also needs this structural change. Recent General Chapters have all indicated that this is the path forward for us as a Congregation. Pope Francis says that this is the way forward for the whole Church as the People of God. What is needed is a conversion which is both personal and communitarian, and which bears fruit in a deeper solidarity and communion. This is fundamental to our Redemptorist sexennial theme to witness to the Redeemer in solidarity in and with our wounded world. These recent events and scandals reveal just how wounded our world really is, how wounded our Church is, and how our clerical culture bears responsibility for these wounds.

Pope Francis forcefully declares in his *Letter*: “*Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. **To say “no” to abuse is to say an emphatic “no” to all forms of clericalism.***” In the spirit of *Lumen Gentium* and Vatican Council II, we must foster this essential and integral communion and solidarity by which the Church can once again become an instrument of *copiosa redemptio* for the whole world (Cf LG 1).

Is it too late for the Church as an institution? Would we not be more sensible to abandon this ‘burning building’ and begin anew? With St. Alphonsus, I say **NO** to this discouragement and despair! And further, I believe that the Congregation he founded has a vital role in promoting and working for the change that is so needed.

My brothers, I would like to make one very concrete suggestion for action to all of you. I propose that in all of our Churches and parishes, in our retreat and spirituality centres and schools, every Redemptorist community organize a session involving lay people to consider the *Letter to the People of God* from Pope Francis. Together, Redemptorist missionaries and lay people, with religious Sisters and community leaders, we can think of concrete ways of putting this letter into practice in all our communities, parishes, shrines, colleges and schools. Let us work for change in the spirit of this challenge from Pope Francis.

Recently, a Jesuit told me of his father who is a retired firefighter in the United States. During the aftermath of the attacks in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001, many people were saying: “We need heroes!” In response, his father told this young Jesuit that we need simple, ordinary firefighters. In the face of difficult times or disasters, when everyone else runs away, firefighters run *into* burning buildings to save others. Today, we need brave missionaries who will run into burning buildings, knowing that their efforts may not save the building, but knowing also that we must try and give it our all.

In late November 1732, Alphonsus went from Scala to Naples. It seemed that his fledgling Congregation was failing. And soon he would be alone with Brother Vito as his dreams went up in flames and smoke. Or so it seemed. On November 28, responding to the Lord in prayer, Alphonsus made his vow and oath of perseverance – that no matter what came, no matter what failed, no matter who left him - he would not abandon the vocation he had received from the Lord his Redeemer. May he help us today to do the same and renew our own vow and oath of perseverance with joy and hope.

*“Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer, Redemptorists as apostolic men and genuine disciples of Saint Alphonsus follow Christ the Redeemer with hearts full of joy; denying themselves and always ready to undertake what is demanding, they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption.”* (Const. 20)



Trusting in the blessing of Jesus our Redeemer, the love of Mary, our Mother of Perpetual Help, and the intercession of Alphonsus our confre,er,

Your brother in the Redeemer,

*Michael Brehl, C.S.R.*  
Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

