



For victims of abuse

## MARCH

**“Let us pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the ecclesial community that they may find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering”**



## PRAYER INTENTION REFLECTION

### MEETING

"THE PROTECTION OF MINORS IN THE CHURCH"<sup>4</sup>

Francis

24 February 2019

[...] Our work has made us realize once again that the gravity of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors is, and historically has been, a widespread phenomenon in all cultures and societies. Only in relatively recent times has it become the subject of systematic research, thanks to changes in public opinion regarding a problem that was previously considered taboo; everyone knew of its presence yet no one spoke of it. I am reminded too of the cruel religious practice, once widespread in certain cultures, of sacrificing human beings – frequently children – in pagan rites. Yet even today, the statistics available on the sexual abuse of minors drawn up by various national and international organizations and agencies (the WHO, UNICEF, INTERPOL, EUROPOL and others) do not represent the real extent of the phenomenon, which is often underestimated, mainly because many cases of the sexual abuse of minors go unreported,<sup>[1]</sup> particularly the great number committed within families.

Rarely, in fact, do victims speak out and seek help.<sup>[2]</sup> Behind this reluctance there can be shame, confusion, fear of reprisal, various forms of guilt, distrust of institutions, forms of cultural and social conditioning, but also lack of information about services and facilities that can help. Anguish tragically leads to bitterness, even suicide, or at times to seek revenge by doing the same thing. The one thing certain is that millions of children in the world are victims of exploitation and of sexual abuse.

<sup>4</sup> See full message:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190224\\_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190224_incontro-protezioneminori-chiusura.html)

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[...] We are thus facing a universal problem, tragically present almost everywhere and affecting everyone. Yet we need to be clear, that while gravely affecting our societies as a whole,<sup>[10]</sup> this evil is in no way less monstrous when it takes place within the Church.

The brutality of this worldwide phenomenon becomes all the more grave and scandalous in the Church, for it is utterly incompatible with her moral authority and ethical credibility. Consecrated persons, chosen by God to guide souls to salvation, let themselves be dominated by their human frailty or sickness and thus become tools of Satan. In abuse, we see the hand of the evil that does not spare even the innocence of children. No explanations suffice for these abuses involving children. We need to recognize with humility and courage that we stand face to face with the mystery of evil, which strikes most violently against the most vulnerable, for they are an image of Jesus. For this reason, the Church has now become increasingly aware of the need not only to curb the gravest cases of abuse by disciplinary measures and civil and canonical processes, but also to decisively confront the phenomenon both inside and outside the Church. She feels called to combat this evil that strikes at the very heart of her mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the little ones and to protect them from ravenous wolves.

Here again I would state clearly: if in the Church there should emerge even a single case of abuse – which already in itself represents an atrocity – that case will be faced with the utmost seriousness. Brothers and Sisters: in people's justified anger, the Church sees the reflection of the wrath of God, betrayed and insulted by these deceitful consecrated persons. The echo of the silent cry of the little ones who, instead of finding in them fathers and spiritual guides encountered tormentors, will shake hearts dulled by hypocrisy and by power. It is our duty to pay close heed to this silent, choked cry.

So what would be the existential "meaning" of this criminal phenomenon? In the light of its human breadth and depth, it is none other than the present-day manifestation of the spirit of evil. If we fail to take account of this dimension, we will remain far from the truth and lack real solutions.

[...] The Church's aim will thus be to hear, watch over, protect and care for abused, exploited and forgotten children, wherever they are. To achieve that goal, the Church must rise above the ideological disputes and journalistic practices that often exploit, for various interests, the very tragedy experienced by the little ones.

The time has come, then, to work together to eradicate this evil from the body of our humanity by adopting every necessary measure already in force on the international level and ecclesial levels. The time has come to find a correct equilibrium of all values in play and to provide uniform directives for the Church, avoiding the two extremes of a "*justicialism*" provoked by guilt for past errors and media pressure, and a *defensiveness* that fails to confront the causes and effects of these grave crimes.