

**Companions on the Journey**

**April 3, 2022**

Dear Friends,

I would like to share with you a column I wrote six years ago. It seems germane in this time of Pandemic disease and resurgent war and the hardness of our human hearts at time. I am grateful for your forbearance.

February 28, 2016

Dear Friends,

Back in the millennial year (2000AD) you may remember that the then Holy Father, Saint John Paul II took the most unusual step of asking forgiveness from the Jews and the Protestants and the Orthodox for the past sins of the Catholic Church. John Paul did not commit those sins but there were moments when the Church was anything but her best self despite the fact that there were a lot of good people trying to be faithful. Still there was sin. Still there is sin.

Pope John Paul asked for forgiveness so that the Church might be healed herself. There is a newspaper writer here in town named Clark De Leon who once wrote a column and now is back writing a column again. In some of his past columns he was not always friendly to the Church. Turns out that he had a conversion experience later in life. He had grown up a Catholic and left the Church because of a bad priest. De Leon made his way back to the church, asking God's forgiveness and went to Communion without going to confession. In his column he acknowledged his own hardness of heart, his own need to go to confession and his own need for absolution.

But then he asked a very telling question: Why is it that the People of God have to go to confession but the Church doesn't? For its sins and its misdeeds? Reading that made me think about that very real question. Why doesn't the church have to go to you for pardon for her sins?

"Father forgive them."

"This day you will be with me in paradise."

"Woman is there no one to condemn you? Neither will I condemn you. Go and avoid this sin."

"Your sins are forgiven. Arise and walk."

I have listened to those words many times. I have prayed over them. Because of that I have some very important things to say to you and some things to ask of you. And I call on Our Lord as witness to my words. The first thing, as we pray for authentic inner healing for ourselves and for everyone, is an apology—from me, as a priest, as one who absolves from sin and is absolved from sin himself, as one who is a Church man and who can speak on behalf of this Church I love. I apologize for our Church's sinfulness and I believe I speak for others who are priests that I know. I apologize for her sometimes critical attitude or her anger or cavalier attitude, her hypocrisy which prevents you from encountering the real and true Spirit of Jesus. I apologize for the lack of pastoral care in certain moments or for her unwillingness to help at times. On behalf of your church I ask your pardon and your forgiveness.

For the betrayals by some of your priests and the calculating blindness of some bishops, I ask forgiveness. For those who have been taken advantage of, slighted, used, hurt, taken for granted, even harmed—I seek your pardon. If you know of some who would really needs to hear this, will you take my words to them? Would you tell them of my apology and seek their forgiveness?

I apologize for the hardness of heart, for being too bureaucratic, for teaching but not really explaining, for the smug attitude at times, for laying heavy burdens on you without lifting a finger to help you carry them. For teaching as gospel things that were mere human precept. For not revering each woman, each man, each child. For judging and condemning those who sin instead of judging and condemning only their sin. For these sins and many other sins I apologize to you. I ask you for your pardon and your forgiveness.

And for others you know of or will meet up with who need to hear of this apology for what the Church is not and has not been and for what she has failed to do, will you seek their mercy? This Lenten portion of the Jubilee year of Mercy applies to the Church we love as much as it applies to each of us, her members.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry