



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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Lent 2019

My dearest Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Today we find ourselves before a manifestation of brazen, aggressive, and destructive evil. Behind and within, there is the spirit of evil, which in its pride and arrogance considers itself the lord of the world and thinks that it has triumphed.”

These words, spoken by the Holy Father at the closing of the recent Vatican Meeting on the Protection of Minors, is a clear call to battle the evil of sexual abuse of minors. “Battle” is not too strong a word when describing the effort and courage needed to confront the Evil One. In fact, in the *Prayer to Saint Michael* that we say after Mass in our Diocese, we ask him to “defend us in battle.” And so we place ourselves under the protection of this Archangel to keep us safe as we struggle with the devil, who was even so arrogant as to tempt Our Lord in the desert (Luke 4:1-13).

Even though the Holy Father’s words were a universal call to confront the evil of child sexual abuse, his words are also very appropriate for us personally as we begin the discipline of Lent. In our own lives we see the “brazen, aggressive, and destructive” workings of our individual, personal sins.

During the holy season of Lent, we approach our loving Father with humility, asking Him to forgive our sins, and, through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving/good works, stir up in us the virtue to combat such an arrogant adversary. The Church, meaning all of us who make up the Church, is in a pitched battle with Satan against the depth and breadth of sexual abuse. Through the courage of victim-survivors, light is being shone into the darkness where this sin exists. Satan abhors the light of truth, so he will fight back strenuously. Hence, our need to be even stronger by repenting of our sins and ridding ourselves of them through sacramental Confession.

In a particular way throughout our Diocese, we have the opportunity to participate in the **Healing Our Church** program. In these sessions, we can reflect and pray with Scripture to acknowledge the evil that has been done using Holy Orders as a means for diabolical acts. We also can experience the solace and healing of the Holy Spirit that comes from joining our family of faith to remind ourselves that the holiness

of the Church – founded by Christ – is our greatest weapon against evil. Only Satan’s cunning work could take the Church, his greatest enemy, and weaken it through some of the very people who were called to serve the People of God. The Evil One has done masterful work, but he has already failed in his task. Our Lord promised that the power of hell would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). We live at a time when those words require us to have a great deal of faith as we see our Church besieged by such horrendous acts of personal sin.

This Lent, through our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving/good works, we can repent of our personal and collective sins and re-invigorate our spirits that have been so weighed down these past months. Jesus remains with His Church, the Holy Spirit guides us, and Satan will not prevail.

Wishing you the graces and spiritual growth of a holy Lent, and with my prayers and gratitude for your steadfastness in the Faith, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alfred A. Schlert", preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert
Bishop of Allentown