

over missed opportunities, misguided choices or the misuse of resources. There is pain, particularly among the survivors of abuse, and anger towards those who did not protect them, church leaders in particular. These feelings are shared, in different ways and degrees, by laypersons and clergy alike, who feel betrayed by peers or by leadership, abandoned and often judged or dismissed, swept under a wave that casts suspicion on anyone who loves the Church, believes in its mission and devotes their lives to it. How Jesus himself must have experienced such anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane and throughout his passion, feeling in his earthly body the suffering that would also beset his Mystical Body, the Church. United with Jesus in his sufferings, we cannot abandon the Church, which St. Paul also identifies as Christ's beloved spouse.

To turn away from the Church is to neglect our family, indeed, to turn away from Jesus himself who is forever bonded to us. In a beautiful passage of Scripture, following a hymn of praise describing how God has glorified Christ, setting him over all the powers of heaven and earth, and made him to be our Savior, St. Paul writes: *"And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head of all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way"* (Eph. 1:22-23). Could Christ's intimate and unbreakable bond with us be made clearer?

What does a family then do when it experiences betrayal and hurt? What does a family of faith do when any of its members are hurting or lost or disconnected? Members turn to the Lord in prayer for healing and reconciliation, reaching out to one another, seeking comfort, assurance and the embrace of unconditional acceptance and love. In this conscious, deliberative decision to turn to God and embrace one another, the family – each member of the family – listens, forgives and prays. And the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ hears and heals.

So, where do we start? Exactly where we are, accompanying one another, as the two men on the road to Emmaus. Where will we go? Wherever the Holy Spirit leads us. And we can be sure that this path will take us outside of ourselves, yes, even our comfort zones. But the Church is also most itself when its gaze is outside itself, not hiding its light under a basket but shedding it on the world, particularly those darkest

places, the margins of our communities. The Church exists for evangelization, that is, spreading the Gospel. Remember the Holy Spirit that drove Jesus into the desert to fast and pray and to be tempted by Satan, is the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. It is this Holy Spirit that Jesus breathed upon the Apostles, empowering them to heal and forgive sins, entrusting to them the sacramental life of the Church, and sending them off into the four corners of the world, while remaining united in the one Spirit.

This empowering Spirit is upon each and every one of us, through Baptism and Confirmation, teaching and reminding us of all that Jesus taught his disciples. We possess this power, in ways unique to each, yet oriented towards building up the Body of Christ, here and now, wherever we find ourselves.

The renewal initiative that we have begun – or what one may call a reorientation of ourselves as Church, a communion in mission or “communion with a mission” – is what we are called to do together. It isn't about my church or your church, the diocese or any of our parishes, or the vision of any one particular bishop or parish or movement. It's about building up together his Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, what he is calling us to be and to become.

The renewal begins by asking Jesus, personally, what part he wants each of us to play. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we embark on a process of listening, forgiving and praying together, guided by some of our dedicated leaders, laypersons and clergy, who will help us construct a roadmap for renewal, by which we will learn to grow, discover and navigate together, bringing out the best in one another.

Our mission will be collaborative – lay persons and clergy, persons in consecrated life, whatever our age or personal circumstances. We will work together to take stock of our resources, human and material, with a particular eye and ear for who may be most in need at this time, whom we may not have included, those left at the margins. A lot of people are suffering in the wake of this pandemic and the sociocultural challenges in our nation. Many are grieving over the loss of loved ones and cherished friends. At the same time, we need to show a particular sensitivity to those affected by the evils of various forms of abuse, racism, domestic violence and addictions.