



Cardinal Marc Ouellet (Papal Legate: 50th International Eucharistic Congress) was asked by the Holy Father to travel to Lough Derg for a day pilgrimage and to meet with victims of clergy sexual abuse. He was joined by Archbishop Charles Brown (Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland).

HOMILY OF THE PAPAL LEGATE CARDINAL MARC OULLET LOUGH DERG - 12 JUNE 2012

Dear brothers and sisters,

Pope Benedict XVI asked me, as His Legate to the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, that I would come to Lough Derg and ask God's forgiveness for the times clerics have sexually abused children not only in Ireland but anywhere in the Church.

Lough Derg in Ireland is the symbol of conversion, penance and spiritual renewal. Many people come here to pray, to fast and to apologize for their sins. According to a long tradition, they follow the steps of Saint Patrick who evangelized the country in the fifth century.

I come here with the specific intention of seeking forgiveness, from God and from the victims, for the grave sin of sexual abuse of children by clerics. We have learned over the last decades how much harm and despair such abuse has caused to thousands of victims. We learned too that the response of some Church authorities to these crimes was often inadequate and inefficient in stopping the crimes, in spite of clear indications in the code of Canon Law.

In the name of the Church, I apologize once again to the victims, some of whom I have met here in Lough Derg.

I repeat here what the Holy Father told to the victims in His Letter to the Catholics of Ireland: "It is understandable that you find it hard to forgive or to be reconciled with the Church. In her name I openly express the shame and remorse that we feel. At the same time, I ask you not to lose hope. It is in the communion of the Church that we encounter the person of Jesus Christ, who was himself a victim of injustice and sin."

Dear brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus said to His disciples: "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men."

The tragedy of the sexual abuse of minors perpetrated by Christians, especially when done so by members of the clergy, is a source of great shame and enormous scandal. It is a sin against which Jesus himself lashed out: "It would be better for him if a millstone was put around his neck and he is thrown in to the sea than for him to cause one of the little one's to stumble" (Lk 17:2).

As members of the Church, we must have the courage to ask humbly for God's pardon, as well as for the forgiveness of those who have been wounded: we must remain close to them on their road of suffering, seeking in every possible way to heal and bind up the wounds following the example of the Good Samaritan.

From the context of this International Eucharistic Congress, I reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church to create a safe environment for children and we pray that a new culture of respect, integrity, and Christ like love would prevail in our midst and permeate the whole society.

May the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints help us all to eradicate the evil of sexual abuse and set us free toward a deep and lasting spiritual renewal of the whole Church.

We are here to pray God with the same words of Saint Augustine in the *Confessions*: "You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness: and you sent forth your beams and shone upon me and chased away my blindness: your breathed fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you: I tested you and now hunger and thirst for you: you touched me, and I have burned for your peace" (Book 10,27).

A true conversion can only happen through a restored deep personal relationship with Christ that we invoke for the entire Church, as the prayer of Saint Patrick, the Apostle of the faith in this country, reminds us:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Amen