



Homily of Cardinal Collins – National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – September 30, 2021

Today is a day of penance and a day of hope, and it is fitting that we come before God in prayer, for he is the source of mercy for our sins, and of conversion for repentant hearts, and he is surely the source of our hope in this valley of tears.

We are particularly called to repentance, and to the renewal of our lives that comes from the truth that sets us free, as we reflect on the sufferings of the Indigenous peoples of this land, especially those caused by the residential school system in which Catholics and other Christians participated. As the examination of graves at residential schools continues, we are made ever more conscious of the harm caused by that system, in which children were taken from their families – something that is against all that we stand for as disciples of Jesus – and were often placed in a situation of fatal vulnerability. We also are aware not only of particular acts of abuse but of an environment in which respect was not shown not only for vulnerable Indigenous young people but also for their culture, language, and traditions.

A great treasure of our Catholic Faith is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which begins with a call for transparency, and an assertion of the need for truth about our behaviour: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned.” This is most important when we acknowledge our personal sinfulness, as we also do in the great Jesus prayer – “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” – but we also need to acknowledge that we are members of a family, the communion of the Church, extending over space and time; when any member of the family sins it affects us all. As the great poet John Donne said, no one is an island.

We need to look to the past, to acknowledge the truth, even if it is painful, as we do when we go to confession in our personal lives. From that can come repentance, deeper understanding, and a resolution through God’s grace to sin no more. The truth will set us free.

In the Book of Revelation the suffering of this world is seen against the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. That is a consolation, as it has been down through the ages. But is also a stark challenge to repentance, for our lives on this earth are judged by the norms of the heavenly kingdom. We all need to think again about the words we say so often: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.”

How could such evils have occurred in Catholic institutions, and how did we ever get involved in such a system? If we are willing to embrace the vision that comes with humility, the distance of time can give us clearer understanding of past sins and failures, but also can lead us to recognize honestly the blindness we find in ourselves in our own day, in our own lives, and to recognize the injustices in which we are complicit.



The Gospel today is a call to integrity, for the lives we live must be consistent with the faith we proclaim. The faith comes first: it shows us the way to live, and how to love both God and neighbour. But that vision, though necessary, is not sufficient: we must act in a way that is consistent with what we proclaim. If not, our lives are like a house built on sand, while if our deeds are consistent with our words of faith, then we are like a house built on rock. This same image is used by Jesus at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, which contains not abstract values but a way of life to be put into practice. We can recall the prayer said to a deacon at his ordination when receiving the Book of the Gospels: “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are: believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.” That prayer applies to each one of us.

Today we particularly are resolved to repent of the lack of respect shown to the Indigenous people of this land, made especially evident in the residential schools. We should also recognize and celebrate the beauty, truth, and goodness offered to our whole community in the traditions and history of the Indigenous people, and especially within the Catholic Church. For many centuries Indigenous Catholics have been a blessing for the whole Church, a reality which was acknowledged in the canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, who simply is one radiant example of the countless Indigenous Catholics who have inspired the whole of our community of faith. That spiritual tradition needs to be celebrated with deep appreciation.

As this is a day of repentance, it also is a day of hope, for honest repentance of the sins of the past leads to new life. Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord to the people of his own time, “It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” There are many things to be done on the path of reconciliation, as we seek to learn from the sins of the past and to move forward together in hope, but for people of faith the ultimate source of our hope is the providence of God which Isaiah proclaims to the people of his day. For all of us, as disciples of Jesus, this pathway of reconciliation, which must be founded on truth, is made clear to us through the vision of faith, which allows us to see the divine context in which we live. That encourages us to persistence on the journey, despite the weaknesses of the human condition which we recognize in others, and, it is to be hoped, even more clearly in ourselves.

I will now read the Apology of the Bishops of Canada to the Indigenous Peoples of This Land:



Statement of Apology by the Catholic Bishops of Canada to the Indigenous Peoples of This Land – September 24, 2021

We, the Catholic Bishops of Canada, gathered in Plenary this week, take this opportunity to affirm to you, the Indigenous Peoples of this land, that we acknowledge the suffering experienced in Canada's Indian Residential Schools.

Many Catholic religious communities and dioceses participated in this system, which led to the suppression of Indigenous languages, culture and spirituality, failing to respect the rich history, traditions and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples.

We acknowledge the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community; physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and sexual. We also sorrowfully acknowledge the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples that continue to this day.

Along with those Catholic entities which were directly involved in the operation of the schools and which have already offered their own heartfelt apologies, we, the Catholic Bishops of Canada, express our profound remorse and apologize unequivocally.

We are fully committed to the process of healing and reconciliation. Together with the many pastoral initiatives already underway in dioceses across the country, and as a further tangible expression of this ongoing commitment, we are pledging to undertake fundraising in each region of the country to support initiatives discerned locally with Indigenous partners.

Furthermore, we invite the Indigenous Peoples to journey with us into a new era of reconciliation, helping us in each of our dioceses across the country to prioritize initiatives of healing, to listen to the experience of Indigenous Peoples, especially to the survivors of Indian Residential Schools, and to educate our clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful, on Indigenous cultures and spirituality.

We commit ourselves to continue the work of providing documentation or records that will assist in the memorialization of those buried in unmarked graves.

Having heard the requests to engage Pope Francis in this reconciliation process, a delegation of Indigenous survivors, Elders/knowledge keepers, and youth will meet with the Holy Father in Rome in December 2021.

Pope Francis will encounter and listen to the Indigenous participants, so as to discern how he can support our common desire to renew relationships and walk together along the path of hope in the coming years. We pledge to work with the Holy See and our Indigenous partners on the possibility of a pastoral visit by the Pope to Canada as part of this healing journey.

We commit ourselves to continue accompanying you, the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples of this land. Standing in respect of your resiliency, strength and wisdom, we look forward to listening to and learning from you as we walk in solidarity.