

Digital English Translation of the original letter

- **Letter from the Holy Father sent today to His Eminence Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Metropolitan Archbishop of München und Freising (Germany) (June 10, 2021)**

[[German](#) - [Spanish](#) - [Italian](#)]

LETTER FROM HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO CARDINAL REINHARD MARX, ARCHBISHOP OF MUNICH UND FREISING

Santa Marta, June 10, 2021

Dear brother,

First of all thank you for your courage. It is a Christian courage that does not fear the cross, it does not fear annihilating itself before the tremendous reality of sin. This is what the Lord did (Phil 2. 5-8). It is a grace that the Lord has given you and I see that you want to assume and guard it so that it bears fruit. Thanks.

You tell me that you are going through a moment of crisis, and not only you but also the Church in Germany is living it. The whole Church is in crisis because of the abuse issue; Furthermore, the Church today cannot take a step forward without assuming this crisis. The ostrich policy does not lead to anything, and the crisis has to be assumed from our Easter faith. Sociologisms, psychologisms, are useless. Assuming the crisis, personally and communally, is the only fruitful path because a crisis does not come out alone but in the community and we must also bear in mind that a crisis comes out better or worse, but never the same [1].

You tell me that since last year you have been reflecting: you set out, seeking God's will with the decision to accept it, whatever it might be.

I agree with you in calling the sad history of sexual abuse and the way the Church dealt with it a catastrophe until recently. Realizing this hypocrisy in the way of living faith is a grace, it is a first step that we must take. We have to take ownership of history, both personally and as a community. You cannot remain indifferent in the face of this crime. Assuming it means putting yourself in crisis.

Not everyone wants to accept this reality, but it is the only way, because making life-changing "resolutions" without "putting the meat on the grill" leads nowhere. Personal, social and historical realities are concrete and should not be assumed with ideas; because ideas are discussed (and it is good that they are) but reality must always be assumed and discerned. It is true that historical situations have to be interpreted with the hermeneutics of the time in which they happened, but this does not exempt us from taking charge and assuming them as the history of the "sin that besets us." Therefore, in my opinion, each Bishop of the Church must assume it and ask himself what should I do in the face of this catastrophe?

We have done the "mea culpa" in the face of so many historical errors in the past more than once in many situations, although we have not personally participated in that historical situation. And this same attitude is what is being asked of us today. A *reform is being* asked of us, which –in this case– does not consist of words but of attitudes that have the courage to

put themselves in crisis, to assume reality whatever the consequence. And all reform begins by itself. The reform in the Church has been done by men and women who were not afraid of going into crisis and allowing themselves to be reformed by the Lord. It is the only way, otherwise we will not be more than "reform ideologues" who do not put their own flesh at stake.

The Lord never agreed to do "the reform" (allow me the expression) neither with the Pharisee project or the Sadducee or the Zealot or the Essene. Rather, he made it with his life, with his history, with his flesh on the cross. And this is the path, the one that you yourself, dear brother, assume when you present your resignation.

You say well in your letter that burying the past does not lead us to anything. Silences, omissions, giving too much weight to the prestige of the Institutions only lead to personal and historical failure, and lead us to live with the weight of "having skeletons in the closet", as the saying goes.

It is urgent to "air out" this reality of the abuses and how the Church proceeded, and let the Spirit lead us to the desert of desolation, to the cross and to the resurrection. It is the way of the Spirit that we have to follow, and the starting point is humble confession: we have been wrong, we have sinned. Polls and the power of institutions will not save us. The prestige of our Church that tends to hide its sins will not save us; Neither the power of money nor the opinion of the media will save us (so often we are too dependent on them). It will save us to open the door to the Only One who can do it and confess our nakedness: "I have sinned", "we have sinned" ... and cry, and stammer as we can that "get away from me that I am a sinner", an inheritance that the first Pope left to the Popes and the Bishops of the Church. And then we will feel that healing shame that opens the doors to the compassion and tenderness of the Lord who is always close to us. As a Church we must ask for the grace of shame, and that the Lord save us from being the shameless prostitute of Ezekiel 16.

I like how you finish the letter: "I will continue with pleasure to be a priest and bishop of this Church and I will continue to commit myself at the pastoral level as long as I keep it sensible and timely. I would like to dedicate the future years of my service more intensely to pastoral care and to strive for a spiritual renewal of the Church, as you tirelessly ask "

And this is my answer, dear brother. Continue as you propose but as Archbishop of Munchen und Freising. And if you are tempted to think that, by confirming your mission and not accepting your resignation, this Bishop of Rome (your brother who loves you) does not understand you, think about what Peter felt before the Lord when, in his own way , presented the resignation to him: "get away from me, I'm a sinner", and listen to the answer: "shepherd my sheep."

With brotherly affection.

FRANCISCO

[1] There is a danger of not accepting the crisis and taking refuge in conflicts, an attitude that ends up suffocating and preventing any possible transformation. Because the crisis has a seed of hope, the conflict - on the contrary - of despair; the crisis involves ... the conflict - instead - entangles us and provokes the aseptic attitude of Pilate: «I am innocent of this blood. It is your business "(Mt. 27, 24) ... how much harm he has done to us and is doing to us.

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