



Pray for Bishops

I write these words on New Year's Day. By the time you read them, the American bishops' retreat in Chicago will be history, but I leave to take part in it tomorrow.

Such a retreat for all the bishops at once is unprecedented. Pope Francis asked us to spend a week together in prayer, reflection, and worship as the storm of sex abuse, cover-up, and loss of trust buffets the Church. We will do no business, make no speeches, take no votes. Instead, we will listen twice a day to a remarkable preacher sent from Rome, Father Cantalamessa. I've read him for years and am delighted at the prospect of hearing him in person. He will give us much to ponder and pray over, which is what we'll spend the rest of the day doing in silence. In that graced, shared silence we will be vulnerable to the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit, Who has launched the Church out into the deep more than once before. We all need to pray hard that He will do so again.

St. John Fisher showed us how 500 years ago, in a time no less torn than our own. He was born in 1469 and died under the executioner's axe in 1535—the only bishop in England to refuse to swear allegiance to King Henry VIII. As the Church crumbled around him on every side, St. John Fisher faced up to a king;

he held his ground to the end, just as he prayed he would. Perhaps we would do well to make his prayer our own as the ground shifts beneath our feet.

The words that follow are his "Prayer for Holy Bishops."

Lord, according to Your promise
that the Gospel should be preached
throughout the whole world,
raise up men fit for such work.
The Apostles were but soft and yielding clay
till they were baked hard
by the fire of the Holy Spirit.
So, good Lord, do now in like manner
with Your Church militant,
change and make the soft and slippery earth
into hard stones.

Set in Your Church strong and mighty pillars
that may suffer and endure great labors—
watching, poverty, thirst,
hunger, cold, and heat—
which also shall not fear
the threatenings, persecution, neither death,
but always persuade and think with
themselves to suffer with a good will,
slanders, shame, and all kinds of torments,
for the glory and laud of Your Holy Name.

By this manner, good Lord,
the truth of your Gospel
shall be preached throughout the world.
Therefore, merciful Lord,
exercise Your mercy,
show it indeed upon Your Church.

Amen.