News



U.S. bishops pray during Mass in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Mundelein Seminary Jan. 3 at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois, near Chicago. (CNS/Bob Roller)



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Although the weeklong retreat for U.S. Catholic bishops emphasized quiet reflection, several bishops spoke out on social media during the retreat and after it wrapped up Jan. 8 with positive reaction about it and to give shoutouts to the retreat leader, Capuchin Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, who has preached to popes and top officials of the Roman Curia for nearly 40 years.

One bishop said listening to Cantalamessa was akin to being in the presence of the early Christian theologians. "Clear, intensely filled with the Holy Spirit, and all for the Kingdom of God," Auxiliary Bishop Michael Boulette of San Antonio said in a tweet. "Let us continue to pray for one another, our church and our world. A blessing to be here!"

Archbishop Paul Etienne of Anchorage, Alaska, tweeted that the retreat leader was a "true instrument of the Lord" and that the Holy Spirit was at work during the retreat.

Bishop Lawrence Persico of Erie, Pennsylvania, described Cantalamessa's talks and homilies as "powerful and engaging."

He tweeted that he was glad they had time to reflect and pray about their role as shepherds, stressing: "We must start there to be able to offer healing. I am taking this very seriously but feeling positive."

Boston Auxiliary Bishop Mark O'Connell said it was a "truly blessed experience" to be on retreat with Cantalamessa and fellow U.S. bishops.

"The Holy Spirit was powerfully present, and I was quite moved," he tweeted. He also thanked the pope for giving the bishops this gift.

Pope Francis suggested the bishops hold the retreat and offered the services of the 84-year-old Cantalamessa, who has served as preacher of the papal household since

1980. The time of prayer Jan. 2-8 at Mundelein Seminary at the University of St. Mary of the Lake near Chicago was planned largely in response to last summer's revelations of allegations of sex abuse that reached the highest levels of the U.S. church.

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In a Jan. 8 column for Angelus News, the archdiocesan news outlet of Los Angeles, Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles said the bishops' retreat leader focused "our attention on the vocation and responsibility of bishops in this moment in the church."

"We are praying together as a visible sign of our unity as bishops and our communion with the Holy Father. There is a collegial spirit here and a firm commitment to address the causes of the abuse crisis we face and continue the work of renewing the church," he added.

The archbishop said Cantalamessa asked them to "trust more in the Holy Spirit. We need to have confidence that we are always living in God's loving presence."

In a Jan. 9 column for Chicago Catholic, the newspaper of the Chicago archdiocese, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said that the bishops did not leave the retreat with all the answers.

"But we are leaving with a renewed sense that it is our time to … take our cue from the guidance of Christ's spirit rather than our own efforts," he wrote.

"We also come away reminded that we will need to keep our priorities straight," Cupich said. "One other blessing from our days together is that it drew us closer to each other and to the Holy Father. One bishop told me, 'Pope Francis was right to call us to take a retreat and it shows that he cares deeply about our ministry and the church in this country.' "

"I have no doubt that just as the early church relied on Peter's unique ministry to meet the challenges of the day, so we will draw strength and insight from our unity with his successor," he wrote.



Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, center, attends a prayer service in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at Mundelein Seminary Jan. 2 at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois, near Chicago. (CNS/Bob Roller)

Bishop Frank Caggiano of Bridgeport, Connecticut, wrote a few blog posts about the retreat with some reflection about the retreat leader's message.

He said they heard about the need to emphasize in their preaching the fundamental belief in Jesus before delving into his message and teachings.

He also said Cantalamessa emphasized the need to root out "love of money" and all that it implies, including material possessions, honor or power.

"If this pursuit for 'money' needs to be rooted out from our Christian lives, then we need to embrace a true spirit of detachment," the bishop wrote, adding that he would add more to that topic in the days ahead.

The theme of the U.S. bishops' retreat was "the mission of the apostles and of their successors" drawing from Mark 3:14, which says Jesus "appointed 12 — whom he also named apostles — that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach."

Reflections from the retreat do not seem to be about the crisis in particular, maybe for a reason.

In an email to Catholic News Service weeks before the retreat, Cantalamessa said he would "not talk about pedophilia and will not give advice about eventual solutions; that is not my task and I would not have the competence to do so."

"The Holy Father asked for my availability to lead a series of spiritual exercises for the episcopal conference so that the bishops, far from their daily commitments, in a climate of prayer and silence and in a personal encounter with the Lord, can receive the strength and light of the Holy Spirit to find the right solutions for the problems that afflict the U.S. church today," he added.