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Opinion



A rare snowfall covers St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 26, 2018. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Peter Daly

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Nothing.

That is what I am expecting from the bishops in Rome in February.

Nothing.

Maybe that seems a bit pessimistic, but I think it is realistic. I've been disappointed at their lack of courage and leadership before. So, this time, it is best to expect nothing.

I was disappointed in 2003 when the U.S. bishops drafted the Dallas Charter which rightly held priests accountable for sexual abuse of minors but did nothing about the accountability of the bishops. They thought only Rome could hold them accountable.

I was disappointed in their implementation of the Dallas Charter when some bishops refused to turn over their files to the investigators and when many lay members of the advisory board felt compelled to resign because of bishops' non-cooperation.

I was disappointed last November when the regular meeting of the U.S. bishops in Baltimore, which was supposed to be dedicated to the sexual abuse crisis, did absolutely nothing, at the request of the Vatican. I agreed with those who said they should at least have passed some recommendations.

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I was disappointed this month when Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher of the papal household, didn't deal with the scandal in his retreat. Instead he dismissed the talk of abolishing celibacy. He said celibacy is "eschatologically more advanced in that it approximates the definitive state toward which we are all journeying." What? How in the world would anyone know such a thing? The eschaton and the next life remain an absolute mystery to us. All we know is that we shall be changed. Who knows, there probably will be no such thing as sexes in the next life. (Jesus says there will be no marriage or people being given in marriage.) But that is the sort of airy nonsense that has landed us in this mess. Maybe in the next world there will be no sex and sexuality, but in this world, now, we have to deal with human life as it is lived in this world, in this nature, in this flesh. Airy nonsense.

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So now I am expecting nothing. At least that way it is hard to be disappointed.

I am expecting nothing because they have already taken off the table many topics that are directly and indirectly related to the scandals.

Immediate resignations of all guilty bishops — off the table.

Celibacy — off the table.

Ordaining women to the diaconate or to the priesthood — off the table.

A more realistic sexual ethic that takes account of psychology and biology — off the table.

The accountability of bishops to lay people — off the table.

The careerism and cronyism in the episcopacy — off the table.

In other words, anything that will actually bring about a reform is off the table.

There will be some good things about the meeting. The bishops will hear from victims. The damage and pain that child abuse has caused will be laid bare. The church will have to admit that this is a world-wide problem. There will probably be a moving penance service. There will be some good talks.

But that's not enough. People don't want more talk. They want action.

We do not want another endless act of contrition. We do not want more breast-beating statements of sorrow, with nobody being held responsible. We do not want them to absolve themselves. This is not about more *mea culpas*. It is about change.

The editorial in NCR just before the November meeting in Baltimore got it right. It's over.

The self-aggrandizing, cliquish, old-boys' club, with all its regal claptrap is over. It impresses nobody that bishops come out to parishes like potentates, taking their miters on and off, like a crown. It impresses no one that they have titles of "eminence" and "excellence" and "most reverend." It impresses nobody that they

were some other bishop's secretary or vicar general. It impresses no one that they climbed the corporate ladder of success in the big corporation that is the Catholic Church.

What we want to see is humility.

What we want to see is accountability.

What we want to see is action.

We probably won't see it. Certainly not from the Cardinal-Raymond-Burke-wing of the church.

That is why I am expecting nothing.

At least that way I will not be disappointed.

[Fr. Peter Daly is a retired priest of the Washington Archdiocese and a lawyer. After 31 years of parish service, he now works with Catholic Charities.]

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