News

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The Catholic Church in Chile must do everything possible to repair the damage caused by clergy sexual abuse and subsequent cover-up, and accept the decision of the courts investigating cases, the new apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Santiago said.

Speaking to journalists in Rome April 4, Bishop Celestino Aós Braco of Copiapo, Chile, said the Chilean church must "learn and act to prevent these things that should have never happened and that do not have any justification because there is no possible justification to abuse a person."

"The person is sacred, the person is not a utensil that I can use for my goods, for my pleasure or for my success. The person is sacred, and these atrocities should have never occurred, these crimes of abuses should have never occurred," he said.

Pope Francis chose Aós to lead the diocese temporarily after accepting the resignation of Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati of Santiago March 23.

Chilean prosecutors are investigating Ezzati, his predecessor, Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz, and senior members of the clergy in Santiago for possible cover-ups of abuse cases in the archdiocese.

Regarding his appointment, Aós told journalists he was surprised because "in no way would I have suspected that he would have noticed me."

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The Chilean bishop said he felt "a little scared, not out of fear" but because he knew the complicated situation in the archdiocese and was worried about whether he would be capable of carrying out the "great task" entrusted to him.

Nevertheless, he said, "I know that the church is not mine, the church is Jesus Christ's and he is going to carry it forward."

Aós, who is in Rome visiting several Vatican offices, including the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said he will meet privately with Pope Francis April 5 and hoped that "he can give me some information and direction."

He also said he will present himself as "a bishop, as a brother in the faith" and speak to the pope about the situation in Chile. Additionally, Aós said he has no plans to discuss a possible successor to Ezzati and is willing to accept any task entrusted to him by the pope.

"If tomorrow he tells me to pack my bags and return to the monastery, I will be happy and content," he said. "In that sense, I am in the peace of God because I try to do what I can as far as what the church asks of me. After that, I have no ambitions."