

A “THANK YOU”

A week ago, we prayed for reconciliation. I had asked that each parish in our Diocese hold a Holy Hour last Sunday from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Gathered as the one Diocesan Church, in every church and at exactly the same time, we beseeched the Lord for a healing of any alienation among us.

That alienation has cropped up its head in various forms. As I wrote our priests and deacons when I decreed the Holy Hour, - these, indeed, have been challenging times. The clergy of this Diocesan Church have been particularly challenged (and continue to be), as they and I live out our call to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in our service to his Church. I praise the Lord that, notwithstanding the challenges, so many continue to live out their commitment to serve the People of God faithfully.

In our ministry within the Church, however, we can, and often do, cause hurt to others. That happens at my hands, as I strive to make decisions for the good of our whole Diocese. It happens at the hands of pastors in their administration of our parishes. It happens at the hands of deacons, priests, and bishop when we make bad choices in our lives. And, of course, the clergy can suffer at the hands of the faithful as a result of non-constructive and disrespectful criticism. There is enough reconciliation that needs to go around!

I wish to use this vehicle to thank our pastors for scheduling and leading the Holy Hour in their respective parishes last Sunday. Likewise, I wish to express my appreciation to those who came to pray. For that one hour, if at no other time, we were united as the one Diocesan Church in common prayer for one special intention. Those of you who participated in this significant event have my deep gratitude. I count on the Lord's promise of being heard when two or more gather to pray in his name, as well as on the mercy that He willingly bestows upon those who ask.

It just so happened that the Gospel for that Sunday's Mass was about Zacchaeus of Jericho. He was the one, who climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus. Being of short stature, Zacchaeus knew that he had to take some action if he were not to miss out on encountering Jesus. Zacchaeus had his faults, which hurt others. Yet, as Jesus passed under the tree, He chose to make contact with Zacchaeus, forgave him his faults, and went with him to his house. All of this, as a result of his climbing a sycamore tree.

In a way, last week's Holy Hour was our sycamore tree. In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, we encountered Jesus. We, like Zacchaeus, acknowledged our shortcomings that have hurt others. Now, may we (also like him) be prompted to take the necessary steps to change and make amends.

My hope is that the power of such a diocesan-wide gathering, as we had a week ago, will unite us in our resolve to be a faithful Assembly of Believers as the Church of Altoona-Johnstown. Let it serve to proclaim that, indeed, the Lord's Reign is among us!