



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 2, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ:

On September 10, 2020 the Holy Father, Pope Francis, granted the personal request of Fr. Jeremy Leatherby for a return to the lay state and a dispensation from the promise of celibacy. I recently received the communication from the Holy See regarding Pope Francis's judgment. Mr. Jeremy Leatherby was informed of the Holy Father's decision on Tuesday, October 27, 2020. Mr. Leatherby no longer has any responsibilities or rights proper to the clerical state. The Catholic Faithful are admonished not to participate in Mass or any further sacraments attempted by him.

Due to having incurred excommunication, *latae sententiae*, (the automatic result of his actions), due to schism, by publicly denying the legitimacy of Pope Francis (cc. 751; 1364), Mr. Leatherby is prayerfully urged to seek reconciliation with the Holy Father and the Church so that he may share in the benefits of sacramental graces and grow in holiness as a lay member of the Body of Christ. Please join me in supplication to the merciful Lord for this intention.

Because of the anguishing nature of the events involving Mr. Leatherby and the notoriety surrounding them I am sharing the remedial steps taken hoping that the Good Shepherd will bring his healing light to dispel the stormy clouds that have for too long plagued many of the Faithful and clergy of the Diocese of Sacramento.

Two separate disturbing matters of faith and discipline involving Mr. Leatherby, over time, have been commingled. These need to be understood separately.

While his priestly faculties were withdrawn, by both preaching and practice, Mr. Leatherby incited animosity and hatred against the Supreme Pontiff. He admitted to these actions in declarations published on August 6, 2020. By these actions Mr. Leatherby incurred excommunication, *latae sententiae*. He is still excommunicated and must seek reconciliation with the Church. For this we pray.

In March, 2016, I was made aware of an accusation against then-Fr. Leatherby for behavior in violation of the sixth commandment. Following diocesan protocols, I promptly withdrew his faculties and placed him on administrative leave from his assignment as pastor of Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish. Over time, I came to a moral certitude that the alleged prohibited behavior against the sixth commandment had transpired in the case of the accuser as well as with other adult women. The grave nature of these actions made me certain that Jeremy Leatherby could not return to public ministry. Dimensions of the initial accusation, though, made necessary a canonical trial, mandated by the Holy See and welcomed by Mr. Leatherby. Aware that a canonical trial would take time, I still was compelled to pursue this course required by canon law. The process extended over years, provoking frustration and anger from all sides as well as from many quarters, and with good reason.

The trial was proceeding when the events that incurred the excommunication came to light. In the same declaration, published by Mr. Leatherby on August 6, 2020, he admitted to behavior in violation of the

sixth commandment. He also then requested laicization (return to the lay state). I acted promptly to convey his request to the Holy See, resulting in the Holy Father's decision on September 10, 2020.

After much frustration and sorrow, God's providential mercy has brought us to the River Jordan where the echo of Baptist's voice calls us to repentance and conversion. The anger, frustration, and confusion have wounded many and weigh heavily on me and my brother priests. The woman who brought the initial accusation and her family have suffered more than has been revealed. Along with her testimony, other accounts of the silent suffering of women have been laid upon my heart. The necessary decision by the Holy Father now requires further steps. I must own and atone for the wounds that have been inflicted. I am sorry that vulnerable souls were abused. Their trust was betrayed. Their confidence in the Church's saving grace was shaken. Their anguish requires respect, care and contrition from me.

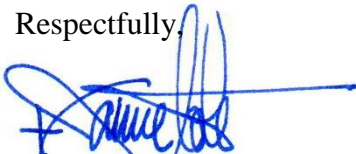
I am ashamed that a brother priest abused the sacred trust of vulnerable women. It is disturbing that he has now placed himself outside of any ecclesial accountability. Both the abuse of his position of trust then his own lack of trust in the authority of the Church brought about the decisions of September 10, 2020.

My brother priests and I belong to the priesthood of Christ Jesus in communion with our Holy Father, Pope Francis. We are the stewards, not the owners, of this divine treasure. This priesthood exists only to serve Christ and His Church. In response to scandals that have troubled this local Church, our own humility, accountability, and personal sacrifice must be the remedies we offer to the People of God in the Diocese of Sacramento. I have admired the pastoral creativity and celibate generosity with which many of my brother priests have cared for their communities caught in the throes of the pandemic. We must encourage one another in this common fraternal endeavor of shepherding with the patience and charity of the Lord Jesus, seeking always to serve and not to be served.

I call upon my brother priests to join me in offering a day of reparation for the sins of clergy abuse on Friday, November 6, 2020. Fast on that day, if able to do so. Offer a Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pray for the victims of clergy abuse asking for God's merciful healing upon them. Let us also pray for one another that we may generously, chastely and joyfully exercise our priestly duties for the good of the Church and the glory of God. The Faithful are welcomed to join with the clergy in this act of reparation.

May the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary revive joy and generosity for the gospel of her beloved Son, Jesus. May we together, clergy and faithful, respond wholeheartedly to the call of Jesus. Let this not be a time of discouragement. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk. 1.15)

Respectfully,



+Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento