



## ***“Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him”***

A Letter to Parishioners on the Occasion of  
My First Year as Bishop of San Jose  
By Bishop Oscar Cantú



To the Dear People of the San Jose Diocese (Retired Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Women and Men Religious, Lay Leaders, Parishioners):

*“Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ After they got into the boat, the wind died down” (Mt. 14:29-32)*

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the Diocese will mark one year since Pope Francis accepted Bishop P.J. McGrath’s retirement, and I succeeded him as Bishop of San Jose. I had served as Coadjutor Bishop of San Jose since the previous summer, allowing for my introduction to the Diocese, while working closely with Bishop McGrath over many months.

The past two years were marked with significant challenges. However, while navigating through those turbulent waters, I have always felt and been most grateful for your prayers and support, which have helped to sustain me in difficult times. We know, from the Scriptures, that it is especially in challenging times that God is closest to his people. That has been my experience in these last two years.

I arrived in San Jose in September 2018, as the country and the world were reeling from the “summer of shame,” the scandal brought on by the abusive behavior of (former cardinal) Theodore McCarrick and other priests highlighted by the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report. Bishop McGrath had decided to hold listening sessions in the Diocese. We felt deeply the justified raw anger expressed by victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse. I was stunned, profoundly saddened, and even doubted my own ability to navigate the local Church amid the storm of anger and disappointment. I felt like Peter sinking in the waters of a turbulent sea. Suddenly, I felt the sure hand of the Lord pulling me up, strengthening and assuring me of his sustenance along the journey. I also felt *your* prayers and support, for which I am grateful.

Not a month after my arrival in San Jose, Bishop McGrath unfortunately injured himself in a fall. His recovery (including surgery) would last many months, thus accelerating my introduction to the Diocese and its leadership. Through these challenges, God’s grace continued to sustain me – and again, I felt *your* prayers, support, and encouragement.

As I prepared to assume the governance of the Diocese in May, I assembled a new leadership team to serve as a sounding board for me and to help me make operational decisions for the good of our people. Getting to know each other’s work style would take some time, as would determining the needs of the Chancery and Diocese. We engaged a consulting firm to help us assess the opportunities across the Diocese and determine where to focus our energies and resources. This process engaged many persons across the Diocese and proved helpful in clarifying direction for our Chancery offices.

Early this year, my trip to Rome, together with the bishops of our region, for the *ad limina* visit with Pope Francis, was both eventful and encouraging. Although my luggage did not arrive in Rome until a few days after I did, the visit with Pope Francis was timely, substantive, and encouraging. He listened attentively, responded thoughtfully, and expressed his gratitude to us for trusting in Jesus during tumultuous times.

Then the Coronavirus hit, and everything changed! Our Chancery staff, pastors, principals, and parish and school staffs shifted quickly into crisis mode with dexterity and steadfast resolve. Our first concern was to keep people safe, especially the most vulnerable. Secondly, we adapted our outreach to parishioners and students through means that were safe. Our schools pivoted, essentially over a weekend, to distance learning. Our pastors and parish staffs quickly learned how to livestream Masses and devotions and to conduct online faith formation, retreats and faith sharing meetings. Some parishes started phone campaigns to reach out to parishioners, while others offered resources for prayer and family time at home. Our Institute for Leadership in Ministry (ILM) continued its classes for adults, offering sessions online. With a sharp decline in income across the Diocese, and in order to secure our essential ministries, we have had to make difficult decisions in reducing expenses across the Diocese. Through it all, I continue to feel *your* prayers, support, and encouragement as we pray for an end to this pandemic and for all those affected by this crisis.

Two months ago, I went on my annual retreat with the bishops of northern California. It was a silent retreat – and the first silent retreat I had experienced in many years. It was just what the doctor ordered! Spending time in reflection on my own life, my priorities, my worries and concerns, with an opportunity to re-prioritize things in a context of prayer was most refreshing. I felt the strong and sure hand of the Lord reaching out to me and sustaining me. Little did I know that two weeks after that retreat, I would face the rather difficult decision to shut down public worship in our diocese. The Lord strengthens us in his own way for the struggles that we will face – if only we trust him.

As we mark one year since the Lord has summoned me to walk toward him in service to you, the people of San Jose, together we recognize that the Lord sustains us in turbulent times. Let us call out to Christ, and he will respond. “Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him.”

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oscar Cantú', with a cross symbol to the left.

+Oscar Cantú  
Bishop of San Jose