News 18 November 2026 | English article

Latest: Archbishop Coakley Tells US Catholic Bishops to Focus on Mission Not Politics in Baltimore

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Construction sites of hope"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, told his brother bishops at their fall plenary assembly in Baltimore on Tuesday 17 November 2026 that the Church must resist the pull of political and ideological divisions, because its work is centred on mission rather than power.

In an address that opened the public sessions of the four-day meeting, he warned that judging the Church through the lens of left and right distorts everything it does. He laid out four priorities he called "construction sites of hope" for the years ahead.

The room was full. Bishops from every diocese in the country had gathered at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront for the assembly, which runs from 16 to 19 November, as previewed in US Bishops Meet in Baltimore November 16-19 to Tackle AI, Immigration and Church Renewal. Coakley, who became conference president a year ago, spoke the morning after an opening Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, America's first cathedral.

"As a nation, we have just come through a difficult and often contentious election cycle which yielded, if not surprising, undeniably consequential results," Coakley said. He congratulated those elected and urged them to work together for the common good and the dignity of every person.

Then he turned the mirror on his own house. The same forces of secularism and polarization that shape public life, he said, are shaping how Catholics themselves understand the Church - in the pews, in Catholic media and on social media.

That single sentence carried the whole address. Coakley said an emphasis on political manoeuvring and winning makes people lose sight of what should hold the Church together. "One fundamental loss," he said, "is the loss of hope." When the focus is on winning, he added, what is lost is a sense of communion and shared purpose - the very thing a divided country needs the Church to model.

Coakley Four Construction Sites Of Hope: Family, Worship, Dialogue, Civic Life

The four priorities come from Pope Leo XIV's encyclical Magnifica Humanitas, and Coakley presented them as building sites where the Church should put its energy. The first is family life. He called the family "the basic structure of society", the place where people learn belonging, social skills and values, experience love and pass on the faith.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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