

LAMENT TO HOPE

"The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds....and you have to start from the ground up." *Pope Francis*

The Liturgy held in St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, was one of lament, but it was also a prayer of hope.

Loreto College musicians played as people were greeted by students of St Patrick's College as they made their way into the Cathedral. Those who gathered were made welcome and the traditional owners of the land acknowledged after which the Liturgy was outlined for people to follow. In a darkened space Michael Herry and Kiran Rajasingam sang of a Church in crisis. A gong sounded as Bishop Paul Bird walked alone to the Sanctuary. His words set the scene for our prayer. "We gather under the Sign of the Cross which judges us but ultimately liberates us. Today we express our sorrow for sins of abuse committed in this diocese, and we pray for healing for all those whose lives have been forever changed."

The Cross, spot lit in the dark, was carried to the altar. Fr James Kerr led the Congregation. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" *Psalm 13* and words from *Paul to the Corinthians* highlighted the experience of abandonment of survivors of family and clergy abuse. It also proclaimed the gentleness and extraordinary love of God for humanity. The mournful sounds of the didgeridoo gave time for reflection. It was fitting that the Lament was led by Jason, a teacher from St Alipius. Our response: "We cry, and we lament".



And lament we did, through the courageous words of the homilist. Fr Justin spoke honestly and eloquently of shame, of criminal activity, of suffering and of the path of healing we must walk so that this broken Body of Christ is again made whole.

A deep and prayerful silence was palpable as Damascus College students walked the length of the Cathedral with waves of blue material floating over the Congregation. Sounds of fresh water and the beautiful voice of Loretta, a young teacher from St Thomas More School, reminded us that healing means pouring out compassion and mercy.

As blue waves enveloped the Cross, the Sanctuary was lit in warm colours of healing: soft pinks and gold, and the soothing words of John O'Donohue the Irish poet rang through the air. Together we processed out singing "Let us build the City of God'. The glow of a large candle symbolised our determination to work together on the long road to wholeness. We left the place of lament and healing and in the newly renovated Hall enjoyed the hospitality provided by the women of the Cathedral and Ballarat parishes.



Lament to Hope began as we sat in the Steak House and listened to the revelations of the Royal Commission. It has been a long and arduous journey. We thank all those who supported us: Bishop Paul, Fr Justin, victims, people and priests who have agonised through difficult times. We are grateful to all who have been willing participants - volunteers from Mildura, Warrnambool, Wendouree, Ballarat North, Ballan, Ballarat East and beyond. Their graciousness, their courage, their understanding, good humour, and their presence has been invaluable.

In the words of *John of the Cross*

Only in dark, the light

Only in dying, life.

Together we, the precious People of God, work together to rebuild the Church.

Karen Davies

Liz Hanrahan

Gerardine Cooney, rsm

Fr Justin Driscoll's homily at the Liturgy of Lament

November 1, 2015

St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat

Thomas Merton, monk and mystic, wrote:

You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage and hope.

It is from deep within the swamp that we come to lament today, as a Church, as the Diocese of Ballarat, as the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We seek to be together, to acknowledge, stand in solidarity with, give voice to, to cry out - in anguish, pain, frustration, anger and great sadness. Biblically, "Lamentations is ancient poetry of truth-telling, an act of survival that testifies to the human requirement to speak the unspeakable, to find speech in traumatized numbness."¹

To heal wounds, make restitution, prevent recurrence, and make painful changes - including changes in the mindset that gave rise to the sexual abuse of children - is no easy task. The sexual abuse of children by clergy and religious that has occurred in the Diocese of Ballarat is criminal and this lamentation cries out in anguish that such abuse could ever have happened, that it was denied and minimised and responded to so shamefully, but this lamentation acknowledges that all of this has happened and we believe those whose pain and courage has brought these crimes to light - victims, survivors, their families, advocates, teachers, counsellors, police, politicians journalists...and we are grateful to them.

Francis Sullivan, in the recent Blackfriars lecture², noted that "in almost every one of the public hearings looking at Catholic Church institutions we have seen how rigid, closed, defensive and combative the institutional Church can be when it is threatened. It has been ready to use all its might, resources and social position to prevail over abuse survivors looking for justice. The first instinct of most Church officials was to protect the reputation of the Church, regardless of the cost to the survivor and their family - and as it has ultimately turned out, at a far greater cost to the Church in so many different ways. When demands of survivors were too confronting for Church officials, threats of legal defences or protracted bureaucratic processes were consistently used to contain the issue or manage them away." He went on to say that "While some survivors have been treated with great consideration and kindness, many have reported that they were not believed by Church officials and even worse, when they engaged in the Church's redress processes, they felt re-traumatized.

¹ Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations and the tears of the world*, New York: Orbis Books, 2002

² <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/108219/151020-ACU-Blackfriars-speech-Francis-Sullivan-CEO-TJHC.pdf>

Among the many criticisms of the Church during the Royal Commission's hearings has been the way in which the Church's culture, in particular clericalism, has played a role in the original crimes and then been a factor in their cover-up. Denial and secrecy happened because clergy and religious operated in this closed, self-protective culture, a culture not open to scrutiny, inquiry, interview or evaluation, with little or no accountability and even less transparency from Church leaders back to the Church community."

Our churches sad, historical failure to respond adequately to the sexual exploitation through abuse of trust and power is a failure to live in partnership with God who works in human history to redeem and renew broken lives, and to bless a people who hunger for love and justice.

We have dwelt for too long in a Babylonian captivity. We have worshipped broken idols of ignorance, denial, fear, reputation and power. This lamentation is a profession of faith, an act of hope in the promise that God will lead us home – home to truth, humility, compassion, mercy, justice and peace.

Lamentation drives us to our knees. Lamentation demands that the truth be told, heard and received. This truth telling is a catalyst for us to examine our responsibility and complicity. Truth telling is a way to alert, educate and help prevent new victimisation. To tell the truth about the victims requires identifying ways we can act to make for healing, offer restitution, promote restoration of those injured and work for justice. Telling the truth here sends the clear message that perpetrators will not be hidden in secrecy, validates victims and helps protect people who are at risk for future harm.

All these simple acts of truth-telling are profound manifestations of faith because they require us to risk the uncertainty of the unknown and trust deeply that God's Spirit works to weave order out of chaos. Risk and trust join as faith to give us the courage to live where the questions are born, the place where God gives waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.³

As we seek to construct the truth in relation to the victim's experiences, we act as a community of faith and discover that the truth borne by the victims is crucial to our whole community's wellness and future. Victims have moral authority to be the conscience of the Church, they hold the truth, an immeasurable gift.

No one who shared any responsibility for what happened in this Diocese of Ballarat can ask forgiveness of these who were abused without first recognizing the injustice done and our own failure for what took place. This is the path of repentance for us and why we gather under the sign of the cross which judges us but which ultimately liberates us.

It is now time to return to our mission, to re-engage with our ecclesial DNA⁴ – the basic units of life that give us our unique identity as the People of God. A church that is prophetic is one that has learned how to be obedient to the voice of the Spirit in laments. This spiritual wisdom stands at the heart of Jesus' identity and mission and ours as the Church.⁵

To lament is to remain in the aftermath of death and it is to look through a shattered lens. In this middle territory between death and life we seek "not to offer redemptive gloss over this deep wound" nor rush to proclaim the Good News before its time, but to remain in this profound experience of disorientation which is experienced not only by victims and survivors, but so often also by those closest to them – families, parents, brothers and sisters extended family members and beyond, to whole communities that include but is by no means limited to Apollo Bay, greater Ballarat, Edenhope, Horsham, Mildura, Mortlake, Ouyen,

³ Sexual Abuse, Forgiveness and Justice: A Journey in Faith, Journal of Religion & Abuse Vol 4 (4) 2002, The Haworth Press by James S. Evinger & Dorthea L. Yoder, 84

⁴ Glasson, Barbara, A Spirituality of Survival. Enabling a response to trauma and abuse, London: Continuum, 2009

⁵ Brad Hinze, Ecclesial impasse: what can we learn from our laments? In Theological Studies. 72.3 (Sept. 2011), 470.

Port Fairy, Swan Hill, Terang, Warrnambool and I could name every parish in this Diocese because this being experienced by us all.

Sandra Schneiders⁶, in speaking to the Religious of Ireland earlier this year said that *“suffering has wrought a kind of maturity in those who have stayed that is neither self-satisfying, on the one hand, nor apologetic on the other. We do not claim to know what is going to happen in the immediate or long term future in the world or in the church.. But we do know in who we have placed our trust.”*

In our Diocese of Ballarat let our laments continue to surface what need to be addressed, what desires and intentions need to be purified, and what new habits of mind and heart still need to be learned.

⁶ Sandra Schneiders, ‘The Ongoing Challenge of Renewal in Religious Life’, in Religious Life Evolving: Faithful and Free (Conference of Religious of Ireland) Spring Conference, April 2014