

## Homily By Fr Graham Fullick - Perpetual Sunday of Remembrance

This Sunday is set aside for us as a Diocese by decree of Bishop Bill to be a Perpetual Sunday of Remembrance for the victims and survivors of abuse within our diocese. The Perpetual Remembrance has been tied to the Mass of Our Lady of Sorrows which is observed on 15 September [or the closest Sunday] each year.

The introduction and background liturgical notes for today speak of the evaluations received after the 2019 Remembrance Sunday. Paraphrasing, the diversity of responses requires great sensitivity in discerning our communal faith response. “No matter what we do, some will appreciate it and some will find it challenging and even offensive. Some want us to keep remembering our history of child sexual abuse and some find the constant reminders harmful.”

My contemplation is this. Victims have died. Survivors, people, are deeply hurt. People have come to me bravely and vulnerably not just recently but stretching back 40 years. Yes, I have listened, but not fully, comprehended but not fully. As much as I have failed (and I have only been a priest since 22/2/20), I am sorry and I have compassion. Humility means that we remember we are dust and unto dust we shall return. It is our Lord Jesus Christ who stoops down from heaven and takes on our human nature in all things but sin. Crime is sin writ large. Jesus, completely innocent though he was, was publically crucified as a criminal with criminals, one on the left and one on the right. One repented: St. Dismas. The humility of God is that God became human and lived among our Original Sin and was battered by it, yet triumphant over the anguish it gave him in the Garden of Olives, wept over Jerusalem yet saved it, saw his grieving mother and the women of Jerusalem, endured and overcame sin’s tortures, and overcame even death, sin’s ultimate assault on life. Jesus’ death is a death like ours, but he is purity itself. He doesn’t die like us for we are tainted. God alone redeems us and makes us worthy through his merciful love. The humility of God is that God comes to Earth and countenances our sins. Humility looks the other in the eye and is present to the mystery of God in the other and sees the other as a Child of God. The arrogance of abuse, the rebellion of sin never does. God sees us. The Lord’s kingdom is for the little ones. Unless we become like children in innocence and trust, we will never enter the Kingdom God so established that we may indeed enter.

When we as the Catholic Church in Maitland-Newcastle look the surviving abused child in the eye, adult as they are now, today we look deeper to their soul and our soul. We are, I am, present to the mystery of God in them and in us together as children of God. It may be hard as a Church to say sorry, it should not be, for obvious and grave is the crime. It may be hard for a victim to see the amendment of life and repentance, harder even to trust and believe in the same Church, but the Church is not the same. The pilgrim repents and re-finds the path. Light makes visible the path to salvation individually and as Church. Victims are not the same. The injury remains, scars are there, but they are acknowledged and seen. They teach and call us to be more loving and caring.

Humility is that we stop, we look, we see and listen. To do so is to love as Christ stopped looked and listened to our true needs when time stood still on the Cross. Daylight is the best disinfectant. Christ is our light and our hope. Christ is the Day-Star of the Easter Resurrection. He alone sheds the light of compassion, healing and mercy for he is compassion, healing and mercy itself, in human vesture. He re-clothes us from the soul out.

Our true need and freedom is forgiveness, to be forgiving and to accept God's mercy to be redeemed and be re-created, from the heart out, innocent and free again:- To have the freedom of the children of God.

To survive the crime of abuse is not to die, but to live. In another way however, victims are not the same, even when listened to, apologised to and loved; there is still a death to contend with. As adults grave sin is hard to cope with, to understand. As innocent children subjected to grave sin, our soul can be deformed and stunted for a lifetime. Only the devil wants and celebrates that. We can ask why, why and never have an answer. The innocent should never have to understand crime. Yet that is fallen human nature. Evil is a mystery of the pride of possession of another's soul for the false gratification of the arrogant and pride-filled soul. The prism lens of abuse in families and even communities can become a prison if we do not let Christ in to free and re-create us anew. Jesus let in His Father's love. We must let in the light of Christ.

Perpetrators are mortal sinners, duped by the devil, complicit and acting. They need mercy. The perniciousness of sin is that not only individuals and families, but whole parishes and schools can be groomed and blinded to the light of Truth. We as a Church must let in the light of Christ. We can falter, but alter we must and altering we are. With many priests and deacons from our diocese, I was at the 2018 NCP conference in Canberra. Archbishop Christopher Prowse of Canberra-Goulburn offered the closing Mass. In his homily he spoke with great humility naming the abject failure of bishops, said sorry again and asked for forgiveness. Of course he was not a bishop at the time of these dreadful events, yet he offered this in truth and reconciliation. He implored the powerful intercession of Our Lady Mother of Priests and Mother of the Church. Our own Bishop Bill has had a pastoral life marked by these events and is part of a vanguard of action. Judas is one of the apostles, but he is not the Gospel, the Good News. God is. The other Apostles fled our Lord in cowardice. Peter denied Him three times. Thomas doubted Him. Young St. John stood at the Cross. Mary was there all along. She made salvation possible, even while seven dolorous swords of sorrow pierced her heart.

And I end where we began today's Gospel. What is the magnificence of Mary about? Her prayer is the Magnificat. The magnificence of Mary is that her soul, note soul full of God the Holy Spirit, proclaims the greatness of God the Father, as she is to bear God the Son. The magnificence of Mary Mother of Priests and the Church is that she is humble. In the light of God she sees her cousin Elizabeth in her old age now pregnant with St. John the Baptist. She is present to her cousin's need, not her own perturbation as a virgin now pregnant and having to explain *that* to St. Joseph. She has no concern about public scandal or her need as pregnant. She in her humility sees her cousin. She is present to the mystery of God in her cousin Elizabeth and goes and visits her for fully three months. This Sunday the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Maitland-Newcastle seeks to be more humble, more one, holy, catholic and apostolic and sees and is present to those hurt by abuse. We see you. Lord help us to see and love more clearly. Today God lets us rejoice and be radiant in Him, to pray for the fire not the ashes, to look to the victims together and say in God's light we see light. Let us be children again, contrite, seeking forgiveness, forgiven and forgiving. In seeing others as God's children we ourselves become more children of God. Let us look to the Lord and find new ways to be radiant

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