

'CHURCH ABUSE. CULTURE. BIBLE' – HOMILY – 26 FEBRUARY 2017

We hear this week's Gospel Matthew 6:24-34 about the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field. We see such beauty.

So why do we stress so much about little things.

### WHERE IS OUR CONFIDENCE TO WORK WITH GOD? TOGETHER.

Verse 6:24 begins

***"No one can serve two masters"***

God reaches out to us with inclusive love, justice and mercy, truth and peace.

- We are **NOT** serving God when we permit abuse of children, vulnerable adults or anyone.
- We are **NOT** serving God when we ignore the pain and voices of people abused in the church, or other institutions, or in families.
- We are **NOT** serving God when we put secrecy, self-image, prestige, power as our idols.
- We are **NOT** serving God when we have any idols.

Jesus sets the example in honesty, courage, transparency, inclusive love, prayer, mercy and compassion.

Jesus empowers us to make a difference, to work WITH God.

Jesus sets a priority in Matthew 6:33:

***"But strive first for the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness"***

Protection of the rights of children, migrants, young people, women and men, Indigenous Peoples, Migrants, Refugees, Asylum Seekers are all core business, For Christians serious about being righteous before God and putting the kingdom of God first.

### THE ROYAL COMMISSION

The Royal Commission has spent three weeks on ***Case Study 50 - 'Catholic Church Authorities in Australia'***.

Even though it will look at other institutions over the weeks ahead,

We, as Catholic Church, are responsible for what has happened in the Catholic Church,

And for what is happening now.

Responsible for the processes in place,

And for the levels of justice, compassion, accountability,

Transparency, education, formation, training, policies, protocols,

Leadership, vetting, consistency in application,

Codes of Ethical Behaviour, pastoral support, redress, research, compensation,

And response for those asking for healing, spiritual support.

Responsible for how power is used, shared, and abused.

Responsible for going beyond words to action.

Responsible not only in sincerely apologising,

But showing what we put into place to prove that apologies are real.

And as we have heard during the Commission hearings, what is the culture?  
Why the secrecy? Why the lack of transparency?  
Why the cover-ups? Why the transfers?  
What is the Vatican doing? Why can't the Bishops agree?  
Who supervises? How do you supervise?  
What has changed since the Commission's first hearings?

In January this year, in one of the written statements to the Royal Commission,  
And made available as an Exhibit, our Brisbane Archbishop reported –

*“58 Thereafter Ms Vuleta commenced a program of training of staff and volunteers in parishes and Archdiocesan agencies.*

*59 Since the implementation of this training:*

- over 2500 parish staff and volunteers have attended training;*
- 85 of the 91 parish groups have undertaken this training;*
- 80 parishes have implemented the policy and procedures;*
- 45 parishes have appointed a local Safeguarding Representative;*
- 23 parishes have been working with this policy and the procedures for over 12 months and have successfully completed the annual compliance audit;*

*Centacare Community Services Managers and Coordinators have been trained in Recognising Abuse and Receiving a Disclosure with a view to them providing this training to their staff; and Centacare Child Care Services staff complete In Safe Hands training prior to commencing employment.*

*Additional training in Receiving a Disclosure and Reporting will commence shortly to confirm for staff the appropriate reporting processes in accordance with Centacare Child Care policy and accreditation requirements*

*60 In 2013 and in 2015, Dr Monica Applewhite visited the Archdiocese and gave a series of seminars and training sessions. Dr Applewhite is a recognised authority in the United States and beyond in relation to the appropriate response of Church authorities to the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy.*

*Action 8: Comprehensive Reports of Circumstances of Priest Offenders*

*61 Commencing in about September of 2013 the Archdiocese commenced a series of reports, reporting on the circumstances of offender priests, that is those clergy of the Archdiocese who have been convicted of offences relating to child sexual abuse or the possession or production of child exploitation material.”*

Quoting from later in the document, it says:

*“207 Supervision of Associate Pastors is provided by the resident Parish Priest. All new1y ordained priests remain as Associate Pastors for an average time of five years.*

*All priests in the Overseas Priests Program start as Associate Pastors (average time 18-24 months).*

*208 There are a number of regular contacts with each priest, retired or active through:  
(a) Director· Clergy Life and Ministry, Vicar for Clergy and the staff of the Clergy Office;*

*(b) Deanery meetings of priests in parish ministry (five -six times per year) with Dean;*  
*(c) Episcopal (Bishops) visitation every two to three years;*  
*(d) Overseas Priests Program support meetings with Project Officer (one to eight times per year);*  
*(e) Newly ordained priests meet with the Director of Clergy Life and Ministry (quarterly);*  
*(f) Regular contact with Archdiocesan personnel (Human Resources, Accounting Services, Archdiocesan Development Fund, etc).*  
*(g) Each of these contacts has a process of reporting if there is a level of concern about any given priest.*  
*209 Clergy Health Care Coordinators (nurses) meet with the clergy to check on their health and general wellness.*  
*210 The Veritas program is available for clergy to have access to qualified counsellors.*  
*211 A Peer Support Program is run by clinical psychologist (external to the Archdiocese), Dr John Barletta. All clergy can access this service.*  
*212 Compulsory training for all clergy was presented in 2013 and 2015 by Dr Monica Applewhite.*  
*213 The Annual Clergy Convocation includes sessions on human development.*  
*214 Archdiocesan Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Prevention and Protection Policy Training facilitated by Michele Vuleta and Troy Tornabene - commenced in July 2014. All parishes have undertaken training in this policy for clergy, staff and volunteers.*  
*215 A Peer Group Support network in liaison with Dr John Barletta has been formed.*  
*216 Work Health and Safety training for clergy has taken place. This was delivered by dedicated Archdiocesan staff who conducted deanery based training for clergy in 2006 and 2013 to reflect requirements of new legislation. Regular updated training is presented annually to parish staff and new clergy”*

The list above shows some actions, possibilities and some glaring gaps.  
The document gives a figure to the diocesan clergy in Brisbane Archdiocese who were charged with child abuse.  
It relates the Archbishop's request to the Vatican and the Vatican response.  
It raises the question of performance reviews.

Archbishop Mark's Witness Statement is on the Royal Commission [Case 50 Exhibits](#) list.

#### THE SMOKE ALARM SOUNDING

The Royal Commission has been like the smoke alarm sounding,  
Drawing attention to what has happened. The smoke alarm is there for safety.  
The Royal Commission is more than a smoke alarm.  
It looks into what has happened and why. It listens to those who have been abused.  
It challenges the Catholic Church and other institutions to put child safety first.  
To put first, those people who have been abused.  
It investigates causes. It makes Recommendations.  
It has questioned and published.  
It has made the daily transcripts and live video available, and the exhibits and the witness lists.  
The Royal Commission is not perfect, but it needs to be taken very seriously.

**It is not the first smoke alarm sounding out about child abuse.**

For example in **Queensland**, we heard the -

[Forde Inquiry into 'Abuse of Children in Queensland institutions'](#) which covered the period 1911-99, with over 150 orphanages and detention centres.

And the [2004 Crime and Misconduct Inquiry "Protection Children: an inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care"](#)

And the [Carmody Inquiry 2012-13 on child protection.](#)

**WHO ARE WE AS CHURCH?**

**WHO DEFINES THE MEANING OF CHURCH?**

**WHAT ARE OUR PROCESSES OF DECISION-MAKING?**

**WHO IS EXCLUDED?**

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US?**

If a parish priest refuses to consult in the parish, how can we change that?

If there is no parish pastoral council in the parish, how can it be following the direction of Vatican II?

What needs to be changed universally in the Code of Canon Law?

How do we communicate?

**IN A DIOCESE, WHAT ARE THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES?**

**HOW REPRESENTATIVE ARE THEY?**

**HOW WELL DO THEY DRAW ON THE GIFTEDNESS, SKILLS, INSIGHTS, EXPERIENCES OF ALL MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH?**

With the next Synod or the National 2020 Plenary Council, how will the voices be heard of those who have been abused?

What new bodies need to be formed?

**In the Bible we learn of the faults and faith of biblical individuals and groups over time.**

We gain insights into ways people thought at different times.

Of groups who were sincerely repentant, but then over time, regressed again.

Of how Peter denied Jesus, and deserted him,

Yet later through the Holy Spirit after Pentecost, he could show such courage and faith.

Of how God challenged Paul.

Of how Paul challenged the Apostles to be inclusive of the Gentile Christians.

Of the parable of the Good Samaritan which continually challenges all of us to an inclusive and courageous love.

**We learn in church history** how the important role of Mary of Magdala as witness,

Was downplayed and changed by sexist attitudes.

We learn of so many instances of sin and suppression.

And so many examples of faith lived, and sincerity and unselfish love and devotion to God.

**And in our anger and shock and frustration over the tragedy and injustice and harm  
Caused by the depravity of church abuse,  
We need to speak up.**

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday.

We begin a time of penance, reflection, renewal.

Of striving for the kingdom of heaven first.

As a Lenten practice, express your concerns about any such issue of injustice and abuse in the church.

Give feedback about how the last few weeks of the Royal Commission have affected you.

**WHAT ARE YOUR INSIGHTS THAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

**HOW DO WE EXPRESS SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED?**

Pray about it first, ask God what to do.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Church Abuse. Culture. Bible – 26 February 2017]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/022617.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook26022017>]

Other References:

[Statement of Archbishop Coleridge - General Statement dated 20 January 2017](#)

[Forde Inquiry into 'Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions' \(1999\)](#)

[Crime and Misconduct Inquiry "Protection Children: an inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care" \(2004\)](#)

[Carmody Inquiry - Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry \(2013\)](#)