

## 'SHAME AND APOLOGY' – HOMILY – 15 OCTOBER 2017

During this Mental Health Week, we have focussed in weekday Masses on mental health issues.

This weekend we continue on from last weekend's focus on child safety, and concentrate on our response to church sexual abuse in Australia.

### ASPECTS

- The biblical understanding of feeling shame and the grace to act upon it
- The way we feel shame as church
- A background to Church apology
- Our Parish
- Culture
- Today's Gospel – inclusive and genuine
- Our Voice

### SHAME

In the First Reading today from Isaiah, we hear in the Jerusalem Bible translation,

*"The Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek;  
he will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth."*

There are different categories of the word "shame".

Genuine shame. False shame. Toxic shame. Secret shame.

Negative shame. Positive shame. Vicarious shame.

Being shamed. Being shameless.

**Shame is not identical with "guilt"**

Sometimes it also translated by "disgrace".

### WHEN WE OFFER AN APOLOGY, IS IT FROM THE HEAD OR ALSO FROM THE HEART?

#### HOW DOES IT RELATE TO GUILT?

#### HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SHAME?

We know some are guilty of terrible church sexual abuse.

The numbers are staggering.

Challenges to the church include the secrecy,

Cover-ups, denial of justice, manipulation,

Lack of transparency and accountability,

Culture, compensation, education, training, poor leadership,

Psychological testing, models of church, Vatican rulings and procedures,

Clericalism, the need for lay people in church decision-making roles,

Spiritual trauma,

Preserving the church's image instead of truth and people's rights,

Lack of professional support for survivors,

And transfers of perpetrators elsewhere by church authorities.

Apology is not only for what the perpetrators did,

but also from the wider church responses, including church authorities.

We are guilty as Church and we need to confess our guilt to those who were harmed and sinned against.

## ARE WE SHAMED AS CHURCH?

We can be shamed in a negative way leading to paralysis or self-pity or avoidance or escape.

We can be shamed in a positive way, in that it leads to positive action.

In making restitution. In healing of relationships.

Making an apology is one of many steps to be taken.

It is admitting we are shamed.

And drawing on the grace of God to respond.

In the Bible we see both guilt and shame treated.

Jesus challenged the culture of the day which had a hierarchy of social positions.

He shamed religious leaders

Because of their prejudices and treatment of women and of the marginalised,

Because of their discrimination against others.

Pope Francis last week, in his Friday morning homily, quoted from the Old Testament prophet Baruch,

*“Justice is with the Lord, our God, and we today are flushed with shame”.*

Vatican Radio referred to the Pope’s homily,

*“Sin, the Pope further explained, is not like a stain that one gets rid of at the dry cleaner’s.*

*It is an ugly rebellion against God who is all good...*

*It is shame that ‘opens the door to healing’, the Holy Father said,*

*and invited all to feel ashamed before the Lord for our sins and ask for healing.”*

## APOLOGY

**WHEN IT COMES TO AN APOLOGY, HOW DO WE ADMIT OUR WRONG?**

**WHERE IS HOPE? WHERE IS THE GRACE OF GOD CALLING US?**

**WHERE IS THE GUILT AND WHERE IS THE SHAME?**

**WHAT DOOR WOULD AN APOLOGY OPEN?**

**WHERE IS THE ANALYSIS TO ACCOMPANY AN APOLOGY?**

**WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES PROPOSED TO MAKE AMENDS?**

**IS THE APOLOGY CREDIBLE?**

The Jubilee Year 2000 was a process with three years leading up to it.

There were some who lobbied against the Pope’s commitment to apology.

The apology / confession was to cover many areas of the church’s past.

On the First Sunday of Lent, March 12, in the Jubilee Year of 2000,

Pope John Paul II and several Church Leaders led a solemn prayer of the faithful.

Called a **‘Universal Prayer: Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness’**,

there were several categories of sin by members of the Church confessed.

In category six, *‘Confession of sins in relation to the fundamental rights of the person’*

it included *“minors who are victims of abuse”.*

The Confession did not detail the reasons for minor abuse.

It did not refer to and examine church culture which can lead to abuse.

It did not offer definite actions of reparation.

It did not show any indication that the Church was examining the scale of such abuse worldwide.

The need for repentance had been researched by the International Theological Commission and published as ['Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past'](#).

Its pastoral aims -

1. the purification of memory... is a process aimed at a new evaluation of the past ... because past sins frequently make their weight felt, and remain temptations in the present as well. It stressed personal and communal conscience.
2. the promotion of the continual reform of the People of God
3. witness and service of the Church

The document did not analyse church sexual abuse in depth.

Each National Catholic Bishops Conference had the opportunity to prepare their own statement leading up to this date.

They said that,

*"we have failed to live and reflect the Gospel as we should. We have often failed to make ourselves known as Christ's disciples by our love for one another, and we have given scandal to believer and unbeliever alike."*

*"As Church we have been too inward looking, too exclusively concerned for ourselves and our membership and too little committed to the mission Christ gave us to reach out to the whole world."*

*"... we have often been wanting in compassion and sensitivity"*

*"For our faults and failings, for the hurt and scandal that they have caused both to groups and individuals, we profess sincere and profound regret in this Year of Jubilee and ask for forgiveness".*

The Statement mentioned some specific areas including sectarian differences, Indigenous Australian, sexual abuse, abuse of authority, marriage and sexuality, women, youth and migrants.

On abuse it said,

*"When confronted with sexual abuse, and abuse of authority generally, we did not always respond appropriately, and many people suffered serious harm".*

The Statement did not indicate that the church would investigate the scale of such abuse throughout the church in Australia.

The scale of abuse was not revealed until the Royal Commission Case 50 in February 2017.

There have been Apologies by individual Australian Bishops, Congregational Leaders, the President of the Australian Bishops Conference, CRA and others before and since 2000. On **February 5th 2017**, the President of the **Australian Bishops' Conference** said,

*"Deeply mindful of the hurt and pain caused by abuse, I once again offer my apology on behalf of the Catholic Church. I am sorry for the damage that has been done to the lives of victims of sexual abuse. As Pope Francis said recently, 'it is a sin that shames us'."*

## PARISH

As we focus on important policies and procedures and protocols for **protection of children and vulnerable adults in our parish and in our Archdiocese**, we need also to focus on the **victims and survivors of church abuse, and their families and people in their lives.**  
**Not only the tragic, criminal, violent and sinful behaviour by church perpetrators of sexual abuse, but also the denial and cover-up by church authorities when survivors told their stories. The spiritual trauma they experienced. The betrayal. The effect on their lives. The effect on their relationships. The mental health issues. The loss of life.**

Some comments from our parishioners lately -

*"Where do you find a list of apologies?"*

*"I am disgusted with the Church"*

*"I'm angry".*

*"I'm desolated".*

*"What can we do?"*

*"The Bishops still don't get it." "They still don't get it."*

*"Why don't the priests speak up more?"*

*"What is Jesus asking us to do?"*

*"It brings back the pain of when a family member abused me"*

*"We are all the Church, we need to act together"*

One written email mentioned that,

*"The apology needs to come from the whole community and not just the leadership ...*

*The apology... said in words, action and symbol.*

*The apology needs to be a process that goes over time and not just an event that passes in a day, for forgiveness is a process that takes time."*

Some parishioners have been in this parish since birth, others have moved here.

Bald Hills used to be part of one parish

and Bracken Ridge a part of another parish, until early 1974.

The terrible and criminal sexual abuse by two assistant priests in Sandgate Parish in the 1960s still hurts very deeply today.

As does the sense of betrayal and anger felt when it was revealed some years ago that our Parish Priest from 1974-1977, Pat Cleary, pleaded guilty to abusing a boy in 1967 and another boy in 1973.

Earlier this year at our own parish weekend Masses, the names of Archdiocesan priests who had been found guilty in Court or pleaded guilty in Court to sexual offences and who had since been named publicly, were read aloud.

During the Season of Lent, on March 16, 2013 our parish of St Joseph's and St Anthony's held a **Liturgy of Lament and Repentance** for the children sexually abused by priests and religious.

Inspired by the liturgy of another group and borrowing from them, The Litany included -

- *'In sorrow and humility, we confess our sins against God and God's children, and ask for mercy and forgiveness'*
- *'For the failure to love, respect, nurture and cherish young people, especially the vulnerable;'*
- *'For the crimes and sins of sexual and physical abuse perpetuated by clergy and servants of the Church'*
- *'For the immense psychological harm and lasting spiritual devastation caused to survivors'*
- *'for the sins of those bishops and religious superiors, when they failed to respond to survivors of abuse;'*
- *'For indifference in the face of human suffering;'*
- *'For putting the institutional church before the safety of children;'*
- *'For the anguish and distress caused to the families and friends of those abused by priests and religious; We lament the burdens of sorrow they carry as a result of the injuries inflicted on their loved ones.'*
- *'For those who died as a result of the spiritual, psychological and emotional damage they suffered through abuse;'*
- *'For those who died before they heard our 'sorry';'*
- *'For those who died as a result of suicide;'*
- *'For those whose wounds did not heal;'*
- *'For the sins of those priests and religious who abused God's children and God's trust; We pray that they may find forgiveness and ultimate healing, be delivered from denial and sincerely repent''*

At this liturgy in 2013, a **CANDLE OF LIGHT AND HOPE** was lit.

It was lit for the remainder of Lent.

Originally coloured, after feedback from others, it became a white candle, symbolising the innocence of the children abused.

Some prefer to call it our **REMEMBRANCE CANDLE**.

Placed on the altar.

Lit every Eucharist.

It is a part of every Eucharist.

## **CULTURE**

We need also to focus on the **culture of the church**.

The Royal Commission challenged the church's culture that allowed such abuse to take place.

Church sexual abuse needs to be challenged in all its dimensions.

## **HOW IS JESUS CHALLENGING THE CULTURE OF THE CHURCH TODAY?**

The [Vatican Radio Communique](#) on Australian church leadership discussions last week stressed

*"...greater participation of the laity in decision-making roles in the Church".*

## GOSPEL

The Gospel today Matthew 22:1-14 is the parable of the wedding banquet. It speaks of an inclusive banquet. (An inclusive church). Though inclusive, there is an expectation the spirit of the banquet is lived out. Hence a man without a wedding garment is to be evicted. Not because he is poor. But because he has not fulfilled his calling. When asked how he had managed to get into the Banquet without a wedding garment, he remains silent. He is not genuine. Church is not a club where you take it easy and party on. Silence by the Church to injustice and sin and violence is not the answer. The man in the Gospel symbolises members of the Church who are not accountable and not transparent.

Jesus expects us to be faithful to and genuine in the sacred mission to which we are called. Jesus expects us to respect and uphold the human dignity of all. Jesus calls us to genuine love. Permitting church sexual abuse and covering-up, is **SINNING** against love of neighbour and against the goodness of God. **A REBELLION** against love of God and against love of neighbour.

## VOICE

In the context of Good Friday this Year, Pope Francis prayed about shame  
*"Shame for our silence before injustices...  
for the shrill voices we use to defend our own interests  
and the timid ones we use to speak out for other's..."*

Last weekend we highlighted Child Safety in the liturgy and being addressed by our parish Child Safety Officers Clare and Lisa.

This weekend our Parish Pastoral Council invites all parish members to seek a way forward. ['A Note from the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish'](#) is to all of us. It is also available on the HOME page of our website and on the front tables in the church.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Shame and Apology – 15 October 2017]  
[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/101517.cfm>]  
[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook15102017>]

Other References:

['Universal Prayer: Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness'](#) March 12, 2000  
['Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past'](#) December, 1999  
['Liturgy of Lament and Repentance'](#) March 16, 2013

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*'Candle of Light and Hope' - Our Remembrance Candle*