

## Homily 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A 26<sup>th</sup> February 2017

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Zion says “The Lord has abandoned me the Lord has forgotten me.” When I was a young boy growing up in Mascot there was a profound fear in our Catholic community, the fear of communism. If you asked any Catholic what they feared in the late 1950’s it was communism. My parents firmly believed that the greatest danger their Church and Country faced was a communism invasion from the north. Australia was seen as a vast empty country ripe for invasion. In fact the slogans used by the Government to popularise their immigration program centred on the theme of populate or perish. Most Catholics felt very vulnerable if not abandoned. Men like my father believed in strong military alliances but ultimately through the country would have to stand alone, as it had done in the darkest days of WW2. Mum was unique in her attitude she was firmly convinced that the declaration of peace in the Pacific on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Our Lady’s birthday as she always called The Assumption, was no accident she was utterly convinced of the power of prayer. Mum’s response to the community feeling of vulnerability was to tell us: After every Mass, say three

Hail Marys for world peace. The irony of our family life was that Dad worried about the state of the world and seemed less worried about the day to day things. Mum was quite happy to trust God with the big picture and took great care with the day to day issues. While I think she would be quite surprised to hear me say this; Mum “lived in the moment” in the true sense of the word.

If I was able to tell my Mum and Dad that what Bishop Vincent referred to as the “darkest week in the history of the Catholic Church here in Australia” was not the result of an invasion but was the result of the actions of the Church herself I’m sure that neither would believe me. But this is the reality of our world. As Australian Catholics we are living in the darkest period of our Church’s history. Our Church, to quote our Bishops has catastrophically failed the victims’ of child sexual abuse and behaved in a manner that Bishop Fisher described as criminally negligent. The victims’ of child sexual abuse feel abandoned and forgotten, some no longer believe in God. How do we as Church help these innocent victims rebuild their shattered lives? I may be dreadfully naive but it would appear that all most victims seem to want is a simple apology. What

about us? We are also both perpetrators of and damaged by, the abuse. Perpetrators in that it's our Church yours and mine that has catastrophically failed the victims, we can't simply blame the Bishops, we are Christ's Mystical Body we are the Church. It is that mystical relationship that calls us to be one with the victims we must and will share in their abandonment and pain. We will feel anguish when the Church we love is ridiculed by the secular press as a haven for paedophiles, when our clerical and religious orders that have so long been at the vanguard of social justice are mocked as perpetrators of child sexual abuse. The sexual abuse scandal that has exploded like a bomb in our Church has affected everybody, we are all damaged. However as Bishop Vincent said to his clergy "As painful and discomfoting this may be, ..., it pales in comparison to the trauma and lifelong damage that has been the experience of the survivors of the clerical sexual abuse."

Bishop Vincent urges us to "move through "this valley of tears" where our "sins have been laid bare" to the hope of a Church which is more humble and singularly focused on the needs of survivors."

So what does this mean for us, what is the take home message from today's readings, how do we live in the moment? We must be utterly convinced that the Lord has not and will not abandon us. We must realise that "In God alone is my soul at rest". God knows us better than we know ourselves we must trust in God and not in our worldly knowledge. The Gospel's, our Church's teachings and sacred traditions should be our guiding principles. Remember the Christ Test. What would Christ do? But, you see I like most people have trouble knowing when to "let go and let God". My ego gets in the way, I have to have a plan, I have to save face and I know what's got to be done. The sad reality is this thinking got us into this valley of tears. If we want our Church to regain its moral credibility each and every one of us has step up to the challenge and apply the Christ Test to our daily lives. You see we all have an ember of Christ's light burning in our hearts. If we fan that ember and let its light shine in our daily lives together we will provide a beacon of hope and love in our Church. A beacon that will illuminate our Church enabling it to reclaim its innocence and powerless and in the words of Bishop Vincent become a humble Servant-Leader of God's people.

How? We simply have to live in the moment. We have to apply the Christ Test to every moment of our lives and remember the old adage “When the going gets tough, the tough pray”. Let three Hail Marys for renewal in our Church, be our life’s mantra this coming Lent. So that the prayers we pray transform both our lives and our Church to become true witnesses to Christ, who came to serve not to be served.