

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A
25th June 2016

What image does this statement conjure up in your mind's eye? *“If a wicked priest does a wicked deed, then we say, ‘Look! See what example the clergy set for us!’ – as if one priest were the whole clergy. But we then forget to look for what good men might be among the clergy and what good counsel they give us, and what good example they provide us.*

We act like ravens and crows who never bother with any living flesh – but if they find a dead animal in a ditch that’s where we fly to stuff ourselves. In the same way, when we see a good man, and hear or see a good deed good thing we take little heed. But once we see an evil deed, then we stop and stare. All day long we gossip and feed ourselves with the filthy delight of evil conversation.” No it’s not a reaction to the media’s perceived obsession with the current Royal Commission into Institutional Sexual Abuse. It comes from a document written in 1530 by St Thomas Moore whose feast we celebrated last week. Two things struck me when I read it. Firstly how it describes so accurately our human obsession with evil. How we are

more likely to know the name of a vile paedophile than a heroic missionary nun like Sr. Irene McCormack. Don't get me wrong I'm moved to tears by the plight of survivors of clerical abuse and totally ashamed at the way my Church covered up the actions of those evil individuals who perpetrated those vile acts against innocent children. The second is the birds. I cannot help but contrast the ravens and crows tearing at the carcass of some long dead animal with a wedge tail eagle Kaye and I saw in Katherine Gorge. We had been staying in Nitmiluk National Park in the Northern Territory. Early one morning we decided to walk to the top of Katherine Gorge, we were standing in the early light at the top of the gorge some 250m above the Katherine River when a wedge tailed eagle flew up the gorge and put on an aerobatic display we were sure was just for us. We both stood there totally mesmerised while this magnificent bird spiralled, rolled and swooped in the gorge below us.

When I think of the sexual abuse crises racking our Church I ask myself: Why do I bother? Like the prophet Jeremiah in today's first reading I hear society denouncing me and waiting, if not actively plotting, for the downfall of the Church I deeply love. The answer

to why I bother is also found earlier in chapter 20 of Jeremiah. Where Jeremiah laments; *“You seduced me, LORD, and I let myself be seduced; you were too strong for me, and you prevailed”*. I am trapped and like Jeremiah I want justice to prevail. I want the rights of the survivors of clerical abuse upheld. I want my Church to be remembered not as a perpetrator of sexual abuse but as a Church that saw Christ Himself in the survivors and treated them as Christ would.

How can we achieve this? Well Bishop Vincent often refers the Church as the ‘prodigal son’ who squanders the Church’s good name. Like the prodigal son we have to have the courage to admit our mistakes but like the prodigal son we must realise it can never be business as usual. Peter Powell, a Uniting Church minister and psychologist, has worked with sex offenders for more than 20 years says we must realise we have given away our heritage now we have to figure out what we are going to do next. But he says we must realise things can never be the same.

We have to take some tough decisions. Are we going to pick over the carcass of some long dead animal or are we going to soar like an eagle. We can pine for the

past or look to the future. We can cower away or we can declare ourselves for Christ in the presence of people. If we choose the latter we know that Christ will declare Himself for us in the presence of the Father. Powerful stuff, but don't delude yourself declaring yourself Catholic in today's environment will make you vulnerable and take great courage. When we stand up for what we believe to be right we are always vulnerable. Vulnerability demands courage, it also demands we trust in Christ's Gospel message; do not be afraid. Mathew tells us not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing. The interesting thing about that statement is the word knowing is not in the original Greek. So it should read; not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father. The Father will accompany even a sparrow to its death. So we can be assured of the Father's infinite love for us, a love beyond our comprehension.

Thus in order to figure out what to do next we must return to the Father's greatest gift to us, the presence of Christ His Son in the Eucharist, the Mass itself. We need to refocus on the celebration of the Eucharist and allow the grace that the Eucharist imparts to empower us. Our Sunday Eucharist needs to be an empowering

celebration that propels us into the world allowing us to proclaim the Gospel message by our actions in our daily lives and to refocus the public debate on the treasures our Church has to offer, our good works. If we engage with Christ, Christ will engage with us it as simple as that the choice is ours. Each and every one of us needs to be totally focused on our Eucharistic celebration. Our Eucharist needs to be the summit of our lives that allows us to soar with Christ or we can be tied to some long dead carcass the choice is ours to make.