

22 Sun Yr B 17-18

I was intending to break open the Word with you in a different way, but something changed my mind.

“They should lock the bastards up”, said a man on this morning’s ABC News. I realised that he was talking about me. I, along with my brother priests should be locked up for not reporting what we hear in a confession. The man was, of course, referring to the Church view that what is heard by a priest in this sacramental encounter is sealed and cannot be disclosed to anyone else.

The man was, of course, referring to covering up the confession of an offence by a pedophile. The common assumption and that of the Royal Commissioners is that this happens. However in priestly discussions amongst ourselves, no priest in this Archdiocese as far as we know, has ever heard such a confession. The common assumption, a legal fiction, and the fact do not add up.

We simply don’t hear an early confession of pedophilia in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For what then, do you legislate to “lock the bastards up?”

Why this sin and crime is not confessed goes to the very nature of it, into the complicated make-up of the perpetrator. Pedophilia in most cases is not thought of as a sin or as a crime. It is about many things, sexual gratification and control of another to name just two. Confession and reporting go together. There can be no confession without the penitent reporting it. There can be no absolution without that happening.

But the angry man on the ABC news was right in one way when he said “lock the bastards up.” And, the who takes us into what Jesus has to say in Mark’s gospel today.

You hypocrites... You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition. Mk 7:6, 8

To rephrase Oscar Wilde's definition,  
I hope you have not been leading a double life,  
pretending to be good and really being wicked all the  
time. That would be hypocrisy.

The bastardry in the Church and in society  
generally is in not facing, until this time, the issue of  
pedophilia and by not dealing with it.

For example,

"Uncle Joe is coming to stay, then we had better get the  
kids off to grandma's place and hope they are safe."

"Just as well we found out."

Or,

"Father, (you know who) has been at it again."

"Oh dear! I have spoken to him and he strongly denies  
the allegations, better transfer him to another parish  
and hope it all goes away."

It's a toss-up isn't it, between hypocrisy and human  
weakness; of being scared to bring shame or to expose the  
Church or family to a very unpleasant truth. That is where  
this bastardry lies, in human weakness: what will others  
think of us? Jesus calls this deceit.

The little Church to which Mark and James wrote  
had to deal with conflicting views. Here was a little group  
of men and women captured in spirit by the words and  
actions of Jesus. Yet, the direction in which Jesus seeks to  
lead them ran counter to the views and lifestyle of their  
neighbours. True worship of God cannot be disconnected  
from the reality of life, no matter how difficult it is.

It has taken a long time for this human weakness,  
made worse when seen as hypocrisy in the Church, to be  
exposed. Being content to live with an unpleasant truth is  
to accept a world view rather than have another heart felt  
God-centred, view. The world view has now changed.

Instead of leading the world, the Church was led.

What the Pharisees saw as important, (and, come to think of it, easy to do), Jesus saw as not important and looked further to what was not so easy to do, to have love and concern of neighbour.

St James wrote,

Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world. Jm 1:27

Orphans and widows might not ring much of a bell with us now, but in those days widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people in the society.

Who are the most vulnerable in our society today? The answer would have to include children, genuine refugees, those who suffer from some form of mental illness and exploited workers.

In Australia, religion and the Church in particular have become fair game for attack and for good reason, yet we are the Church, we are the body of Christ in the world.

Nevertheless we have to be careful lest evil intentions of the heart cause us to sin against our neighbour by manipulating, using, deceiving, harming or hurting them. That's where the bastardry comes from.

What shows us to be the body of Christ in the world is how we treat the men, women and children around us, with kindness, consideration, respect compassion fairness and love.

St James could well have written

I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be good and really being wicked all the time. That would be hypocrisy.