

Marist College Canberra's lamentation ceremony

Francis Sullivan 17 November 2017

A very common question put to me from parishioners and interested people alike is how can healing happen for those who have been abused. Not being an expert in the field I quickly defer to others. But when it comes to asking what we as a Catholic community can do to begin a collective expression of healing some ideas do come to mind.

Firstly, with the help of this Royal Commission, we have had to publicly acknowledge the injustices and shame that has riddled our faith community. We have had to accept that there were structural reasons why abuse cases were covered up and victims treated poorly.

Secondly, we have recognised the need for atonement. That is, to make very public expressions of repentance and unqualified forgiveness. This is best expressed in heartfelt lamentation as a community.

The other night in the national capital I was privileged to be a part of the Marist College Canberra's lamentation ceremony for the victims at that school. It was a profoundly moving ceremony attended by some victims, their families, school staff, students and the broader school community. To describe it as being poignant somehow falls short.

The ceremony was beautifully crafted and paced. Silence intimately shaped the service. In that shared silence was a ground of knowing. Words were not needed to acknowledge the weight of history. Neither were they needed to express the depth of pain, suffering and despondency this scandal has wrought.

Yet into that silence came the words of lament and confession. They hang in the air like a ritual offering and then dissipate into the soul of the place. A soul ready for healing and ripe to make amends.

For me this is how collective healing takes shape. It nurtures a deeper response that will outlive these days and will foster a character and resolve for that school from here on in.

It also stands as a testament to the journey so many of us have been on.

For those who urged for and for those who planned that special night, thank you.