

The truth can set us free

"I was told the Inquiry was about human failings, but I believe it was more about human strength. It showed that people can come to terms with abuse, get the truth out in the open and deal with the healing."

I was heartened to read this very brave response from the mother of one of the victims at the conclusion of the Maitland Newcastle public hearings last week.

As the Special Commission of Inquiry into matters relating to the police investigation of certain child sex abuse allegations in the Catholic Dioceses of Maitland and Newcastle is in the final stages, we think ahead to the public hearings of the Royal Commission due to start next month.

The stress and trauma victims may experience retelling their stories of abuse at the Royal Commission and other Inquiries has always concerned me. As the Royal Commission's public hearings commence, we can expect similar, if not more, media scrutiny and interest as the other public inquiries in Victoria and Newcastle. I am confident the Royal Commission will take all the necessary and appropriate steps to protect and support vulnerable people, under enormous stress, after they have told their stories.

With the winding up of the Newcastle Inquiry it was telling and somewhat poignant that one of the last witnesses was the current local Catholic Bishop, Bill Wright. He didn't mix his words outlining the importance of supporting victims in every way.

Bishop Wright said witnesses had finally had the chance to tell their story, to tell the truth, regardless of how difficult it was for them, or how confronting for the community. He emphasized that the Inquiry was conducted in a spirit of honesty and openness – something he said, that has made the Catholic Church today more transparent than ever before.

This is exactly the attitude that is required so that the horrors of sex abuse are revealed and the manner in which they were handled can be properly scrutinized.

Allowing the truth to be told was also a key issue last week when I addressed around one hundred and fifty Melbourne clergy at their annual meeting in Torquay. It was a worthwhile event focusing on the theme of 'exile and paradox'.

I couldn't help but reflect that the scandal of sex abuse in the Catholic Church has plummeted so many of us into a foreign land. We are out of our comfort zones, grappling the incongruences of a Church community struggling with the horrors perpetuated by some of those we thought we could trust.

Blog

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It is a journey marked by pain and bewilderment. A journey that can only be navigated if the truth is told by the people who were involved at every level. It will not be easy to tell, neither will it be easy to hear. But it is our story and it must come out. We owe it to the victims first and foremost. But we also owe it to ourselves, as a Church, so that the 'truth can set us free". What a paradox!

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