



## The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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### Homily at Mass 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C – 3 March 2019

A stinking hot week, a last burst of summer, which brings its own discomfort. We find it hard to sleep properly, it's hard to find a cool corner in the house. And at the same time a mighty blowtorch applied to our family the Catholic Church. Cardinal Pell's conviction in the County Court has left many of us feeling low, sad, bewildered, flat, and brought into focus once again the terrible tragedy so many of us have lived with as part of Church life for the last 30 years and more. In the 1970s few Melbourne parishes were untouched by the flight of many priests and religious sisters and brothers from their vocations. In the 1980s nearly every parish saw its convent of sisters closed and – like here at St Anthony's – parishes with 2 or 3 priests reduced to the solo ministry of one. And since the 1990s up to and including today Catholic parishes, and now the Cathedral, have been caught up in the ugly despicable heinous crimes of priests who have abused children and young people and bishops and others in authority who were too paralysed to make the right decision, to use their authority to act decisively and justly, who failed in their responsibility. Where human justice cannot now prevail, so many of these bishops and priests must face up to themselves and their injustices before the tribunal of God; and here I am speaking of the particular judgement each of us must face in the moment of death.

Both the whole Christian Church and the Catholic Church in particular, and it seems the whole of Western society is in a time of great crisis. The crisis of our times is so vivid in the Church because the Church – you and me – is a microcosm of society; the life of the Church, the life of our family, your life and mine, mirrors all that is going on around us. Marriage and family life is in crisis here in Australia – and the rate of divorce, marriage break down, youth suicide, domestic violence in our society is reflected in our church communities. Each year on Australia Day and the Queen's birthday hundreds of Australians are honoured for their volunteer and community service and these lists nearly always include a few priests and religious, parish leaders and men and women whose first motivation is active charity, love for God and love for neighbour. But the Commonwealth Royal Commission and the Victorian Inquiry into child abuse have thrown up the brutal reality that terrible evil has also penetrated the clergy and others in church life. The sad reality of all this can make it hard for us to balance the great good the Church does in her hospitals, schools and local parishes every day.

“Can one blind man lead another?” Perhaps we can say that for a long time many in authority turned a blind eye to the crimes of priests and the pain and hurt of victims. Please God no more! At last weekend's summit meeting of bishops in Rome Pope Francis called the whole Church to concrete steps, concrete action to purify the Church, to purify the priesthood, to purify and begin to heal the hurts, bruises, injury, pain of all who have suffered and still suffer today. It brings to mind an image of the Church and local parishes that Pope Francis often invokes: that the Church – our parishes especially – are field hospitals in the midst of a war zone where the battle rages, and the casualty rate is so high it can often seem overwhelming.

Feeling injured, hurt, bloodied, bruised, flat we can be tempted to throw in the towel, but this is not the Christian way. We are people of perception as well as compassion, called to action, called to 'walk the talk'. Nearly every Sunday God seems to have just the right words to say to us as the pilgrimage of life continues, urging us to remain faithful, active, generous, resolute.

“Never give in then my dear brothers and sisters,  
never admit defeat;  
keep on working at the Lord’s work always,  
knowing that, in the Lord,  
you cannot be labouring in vain”