



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

74 Grange Road, Glen Huntly VIC 3163

☎ Telephone: (03) 9401 6336

✉ glenhuntly@cam.org.au

www.cam.org.au/glenhuntly

ABN: 70548 570 366

Homily at Mass 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C – 18 August 2019

The author of the letter to the Hebrews gives us clear direction today: “Look to Jesus”. In this last week the NSW Parliament has been debating new legislation about abortion, bringing NSW law into line with the despicable laws we have here in Victoria where children in the womb can be killed within weeks of their natural birth. And because here in Victoria our politicians seem heart set on a complete revolution of our traditional way of life and freedoms, a bill to make priests divulge the secrets of the Confessional has been introduced into our State Parliament. So perhaps it’s timely today to affirm what the teaching and understanding of the Catholic Church is about these 2 matters which are literally matters of life and death. In this we “look to Jesus”.

If anyone asks, our answer always is: Life is precious ... Life is unique ... Life is a gift of God ... Life is to be protected ... Life is to be cared for ... Life is to be nurtured ... Life is to be defended. The Catholic Church is consistent in her vision for Marriage and Family Life. A child needs a father and mother for its conception, birth, well being, education, up bringing. The family is the first school of the Christian life – from our parents we learn how to pray, we develop habits of Sunday Mass, we grow as we learn lessons of charity, kindness, manners, forgiveness, humility, generosity. The marriage of our parents and their example, and the family life they lead and in which we are raised, teaches us how to love, how to live our own married life, how to be good parents. There is no other school for learning the way of Marriage and family life.

For us children are a gift, a blessing. Modern medicine enables us to know the sex of the baby even in the womb, and it can also detect how the baby is progressing and growing. But is abortion legitimate because mum and dad want a boy instead of a girl? Or if the baby has brown eyes not blue? Or if the baby has a cleft palate, or a couple of missing fingers or toes, or more serious illness or handicap? Can there be any limits to the love of a mum and dad for a little child whom they conceive? Can there be any limit to the support and help that a society as well off as ours can offer and provide? An ever increasing body of research shows more and more that abortion is never the answer – that both father and mother carry the pain and regret of abortion always.

Archbishop Comensoli said on Melbourne radio this week that he can see no conflict between the concept of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse and the seal of the Sacrament of Penance. He also said that he was prepared to go to goal rather than betray the confidence of a penitent. I’m happy to join him there.

There's 2 or 3 things we need to think about here.

One is the Church's firm and uncompromising commitment to the well being of children and vulnerable adults, indeed the well being of all of us. Times have changed since the Royal Commission and Victorian State Inquiry. Priests, bishops, deacons, lay leaders and parish volunteers must all have a current Working With Children Check (Victorian Government). The Church has strict laws regarding priests and others found guilty of child abuse – priests are suspended from ministry, in many cases forcibly laicised. For years now priests have known that they can never be alone with children, and there are all sorts of protocols about our behavior in our schools, at camps and in parish buildings. For me the best sign is clerical dress including the soutane. As a rule I always wear the soutane in the Church and at St Anthony's School. This form of dress makes a priest visible and a reminder of who he is both for himself as well as for everyone else.

The Sacrament of Penance is a fountain of mercy and justice. Jesus says: "Those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven". That is the priest's responsibility in the Confessional – to be Christ's ears, heart, lips. The priest is a minister of God's forgiveness not its master. But Jesus also says: "Those whose sins you retain they are retained". Priests are trained to read or hear a person's sincerity, genuineness, resolve. A priest is right to withhold Absolution if someone has confessed a crime that must be reported to the police. A priest must use all his powers of persuasion as well as his authority in Christ to point that person in the right direction so that justice is done. When he celebrates any of the sacraments a priest is always overwhelmingly aware that he acts and speaks and ministers and serves in the name and person of Christ the Priest.

Many priests have suffered imprisonment and even death rather than betray the seal of the Confessional. One is 14th century St John Nepomocene. A bishop at the Bohemian Court in Prague (modern Czech Republic), the king demanded that St John disclose the content of the Queen's confession. Of course he refused. The price he paid was torture and then he was thrown off the Charles Bridge into the river Moldau. He drowned. You can pray at his tomb today in Prague Cathedral. He is the patron saint of confessors.

The responsibility of priests in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is clearly stated by Catechism of the Catholic Church and YOUCAT:

1465 When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

1466 The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but it's servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ. He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior, experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

May a priest later repeat something he has learned in confession?

No. Under no circumstances. The secrecy of the confessional is absolute. Any Priest who would tell another person something he had learned in the confessional would be excommunicated. Even to the police, the priest cannot say or suggest anything.

There is hardly anything that priests take more seriously than the seal of the confessional. There are priests who have suffered torture for it and have gone to their deaths. Therefore, you can speak candidly and unreservedly to a priest and confide in him with great peace of mind, because his only job at the moment is to be entirely "the ear of God".

YOUCAT n 238

