



# The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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## Homily at Mass 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C – 15 September 2019

A very long Gospel today – it could easily be summed up in a few words from St Paul in today’s second reading: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”. Who are the sinners? It is all those whom Jesus welcomes into his company, to whom he reaches out to befriend and love. “This man” the Pharisees and scribes complain, “welcomes sinners and eats with them”. To this you and I say: “Lord Jesus, thank you”.

“The Gospel of mercy is the Gospel of St Luke” the 5<sup>th</sup> century Pope St Leo the Great says. And the long Gospel we listened today – the whole 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of St Luke’s Gospel – is often referred to as the “Gospel within the Gospel”. If we knew nothing else of the teaching and parables of Jesus other than these 3, it would be enough, don’t you think? The shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep; the woman who turns her house upside down until she finds the small coin, part of her bridal crown, every bit as valuable and sentimental as your wedding ring; and the dramatic story of the lost son and the indulgent father. These parables are all personal favourites. Many of us learnt about them at school preparing for First Reconciliation. They speak to us of the sort of God we know, love, trust and believe in: our God of mercy, our God of compassion, our God who loves us so much – even personally and individually – that he wants none of us to feel lost, frightened or abandoned. He wants each of us to know that he loves us and values us. He wants each of us – and the whole world – to know that he is our good Father.

Human sin is a death wish. In demanding his inheritance the boy wishes his father was already dead and gone. But off he goes. Out into the big wide world. Off to foreign places. He throws himself into a life style of hedonism and smugness. As long as he has plenty of cash to splash around he can’t count the number of friends and hangers on. But once it’s all spent, “he feels the pinch”. He may as well be dead. His life, like his father’s money, is all spent.

The boy’s steps back home are like the steps we make back to God and his friendship in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church calls these the “acts of the penitent”. YOUCAT, the Catechism for Young People, describes these personal steps this way.

Essential elements of every confession are an examination of conscience, contrition, a purpose of amendment, confession and penance.

The *examination of conscience* should be done thoroughly, but it can never be exhaustive. No one can be absolved from his sin without real *contrition*, merely on the basis of “*lip-service*”. Equally indispensable is the *purpose of amendment*, the resolution not to commit that sin again in the future. The sinner absolutely must declare the sin to the confessor and, thus, I to it. The final essential element of confession is the *atonement or penance* that the confessor imposes on the sinner to make restitution for the harm done. n.232.

The Victorian Parliament passed into law last week a bill requiring priests to become mandatory reporters of child abuse. No priest resiles from this responsibility. Every priest confesses to his shame the deplorable and unspeakable crimes of those priests who have besmirched the priesthood, destroyed young people's lives, and given us – all of us – a bad name and a blighted reputation. The Victorian Inquiry and Royal Commission have stripped back all the cover ups, and all sorts of protocols and regulations are now in place and enforced in every Catholic parish, school, agency, hospital and institution. A Working With Children Check and Police Check is every bit as common now in church circles as a driver's license or credit card.

Walking round our church property and the streets of Glen Huntly, I feel more self-conscious than ever before. When ordinary people see a Catholic priest what do they think? What comes to their mind? Can I say hello? Should I keep my distance?

Last weekend Archbishop Comensoli ordained 4 young men to the priesthood. These four new priests are each one of them signs of hope: four very brave young men stepping into demanding times, a demanding ministry, a demanding call for the rest of their lives.

Priests also take heart from large communities of the faithful – like all of you at Mass today – who love God, love the Church, and have tremendous patience with us priests. For us the title “Father” is no mere formality. Every time a priest hears himself addressed as Father his heart skips a beat. His conscience is pricked. He is reminded of who he is: a father to the children of God – all of us, sons and daughters of the merciful, compassionate, generous, loving Father of Jesus Christ.