

## Homily for the 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2019

It is not an easy time to be a Catholic these days. You may be asked, Why do you still go to Mass with all that has happened? I felt this deeply when we welcomed some adults who are seeking to join the Church during the week. I asked them, What do you want from the Church? It would have been understandable if they had said, No! But they are not deterred. They all said they are asking for Baptism or Confirmation and Eucharist. So I believe that the truth of the Catholic Church, or any church, lies in the strength of each community, the communion, built up over generations in families, schools and parish. Those adults had witnessed that truth for themselves. So too have the parents who bring their children forward for the Sacraments each year. The Holy Spirit is still at work in the Church.

Nevertheless, it is still not easy thing to do. The failures of the Church are put in our face every day. That can be disheartening to say the least. All this attention reminds us that the core business of the church, if we can put it that way, is about sin and redemption. No community is immune from the reality of sin and failure and the need of redemption. And we surely need to take the log out of the Church's eye before we can preach to others. Otherwise we will be blind guides. This is the work of the Spirit. We are a sinful Church always in need of conversion.

The Book of Ecclesiasticus, or Sirach, written around 180BC, contains a wealth of wisdom sayings that ring true even today. One thing this section is saying simply is that our speech gives us away. Our character is revealed in the kind of talk we engage in. We can put on a good show when the occasion suits, but when we are relaxed or preoccupied, even angry, our inner self is revealed in our words. At such times we can be so focused on what we want to say that we do not hear the very words that come out of our mouths. We can be unaware of that what we might think is a reasonable comment, joke or criticism might be heard with devastating effect by a listener. I think a good practice for Lent beginning this Wednesday might be simply to try to listen to what we are saying. What is the listener hearing?

It works the other way too. Much of the media, and especially the social media, do not hear what they are saying. A matter of fact news report addressed to millions can have a distressing effect on individuals. Unavoidable, perhaps, but we need to hear what is said in perspective. What is said is not addressed to me personally but affects me personally. Social media on the other hand can be addressed to me personally. If it is bullying the affect can be devastating, We are blessed that we have a community that gives us a foundation for how we respond. We need not be alone with our fears amid difficulty and tragedy.

When we are faced with criticism ourselves, when we are deeply affected by the constant news items about the Catholic Church and its failures, then, too, we need to think what our response will be. Our response needs to come from our inner spiritual life that is nurtured by the Eucharist. Hopefully our lives are grounded in the Beatitudes which we heard last week. Then the words from our mouths will not reveal hypocrisy but truth.

The Archbishop has sent a letter to us in light of the sentencing of Cardinal Pell. There are copies on the tables outside and the notice board. In it he puts evidence of the extraordinary good that the Church has done and is doing for Australia so we don't let the negative news overwhelm us. That is important to remember but it must also be evident in our families, our schools and our parish.

The fruit of the work that you do that any church does may not be apparent now, if ever, in this life. We take St Paul's words in the Second reading to heart about perseverance and patience: "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."

Fr Graham