

Paris attacks and Melbourne Public Hearing

Francis Sullivan, November 20, 2015

These are very somber and frightening days.

The Paris attacks have sent shock and threat across the Western world. Not that terrorism is new or unfortunately unfamiliar to the lives of so many across the globe, it is the fact that it now disturbs the centre of Western comfort and security that is so unsettling.

A fear of loss of safety and control and a sense of the future now permeates our communities. A fear that brews more fear, revenge and suspicion, where violence begets violence.

This cycle of despair and destruction plays out on the big stage and the small.

Next week the Royal Commission will start its 35th public hearing and the 12th into a Catholic institution.

The hearing will be broken into two parts – the first couple of weeks looking at abuse that took place in and around Doveton's Holy Family Parish and Primary School in the 1970s and the way in which the then Archbishop, Frank Little responded to claims of abuse by another six priests in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in the 70s and 80s.

The second part of the hearing is a continuation of the Ballarat hearing which started in May this year in Ballarat. Cardinal Pell is expected to give evidence about his involvement in both case studies first as a priest in Ballarat and then as an Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop Little in Melbourne.

It's expected Cardinal Pell will appear in the final week of the hearing which is scheduled to finish on Fri 18 December.

While I am loath to make a comparison between the atrocities in Paris and the child abuse scandal in the Catholic Church the ramifications for victims and their families can be similar.

Victims of terrorist attacks and other gratuitous acts of violence often replay the events in their minds as they try to come to terms with the senseless horror visited on their lives.

So too survivors of clerical child sexual abuse express similar turmoil. Yet this terror is often not understood in the same vein as we recognise the injustice of the random evil of terrorist attacks.

Victims of clerical abuse were innocent prey to random evil.

The fact that it has taken our Church so long to fully appreciate the depth and scope of this is in itself an abuse for all the Church stands for and preaches.

So again it becomes incumbent on all the Church witnesses appearing before this next Royal Commission hearing to be fully cooperative, to speak the truth without defensiveness or anger.

To as best they can explain their involvement in the Commission's investigation with openness and transparency so all can see that the Church continues to come before the Royal Commission prepared to reveal all, come what may.