

With every distressing detail of child sexual abuse by the Clergy featured in the media it is a challenging time to be a Catholic. Despite all the professional changes that have occurred over the last 20 years, and the support for the Church in action, faith in the Church is pretty low at the moment.

Earlier this week I drove into the beautiful St Clements Redemptorist Retreat Centre in Galong for the Assembly of the Canberra and Goulburn Clergy. Driving down the tree-lined driveway, the desire of St Alphonsus, the founder of the Redemptorists, was not lost on me. "A Redemptorist house should be a place that supports people involved in the Church's changing mission and to enable them to face new challenges....A place where people can find refreshment for their tired spirit." As we navigate this confronting time in the Catholic Church it seemed the perfect venue.

As the meeting progressed I was immediately aware of the strong commitment and the drive of the Assembly to embrace the Royal Commission and to do everything possible to heal those who have been damaged. The retreat centre had done its job; there wasn't a tired spirit in the house!

We talked about healing for the victims and their families, and healing for people who feel cheated and let down by the Church they once loved, admired and respected.

We spoke about the importance of practicing Catholics, and people who have turned away from the Church, to be provided with an opportunity to talk. To voice their anger, to share their fears and frustration, to express their concerns, to disclose the deep pain they have. People need to know they are being listened to and what they say truly matters.

St Charles Parish in Ryde, Sydney recently gave parishioners the opportunity to brain storm and talk about this dark history of the Church at a mid-week meeting. As a community, people came together and talked, prayed and reconnected. It was an important initial step in rebuilding the trust and faith in the Church.

In my travels I occasionally hear people express disappointment that the only stories appearing in the media are from the 60's, 70's and 80's. They are disheartened that the stories do not paint the complete picture of the Church.

As Catholics it is a testing time, but it is our time to be humble, to be open and honest and to listen. This process has its time. I don't think we can hurry it, I don't think we can muscle through it. We can't be aggressive or resist it; we have to move with it. There is no point in being defensive; it is better to accept history.

There will be time in this process when we can tell our full story, but for the moment it is the terrible stories of those who have been damaged that are the more important.

Later in the week I travelled to Victoria, where I addressed the Catholic Religious Australia group. Just in a week, from Galong in country NSW to Victoria I am encouraged by the strong feelings of support for the Royal Commission and the robust determination to face the truth openly and honestly.

As a broad Catholic community, we need to find our voice. We need to talk, to support, to express our feelings and to engage one another during this difficult time in the Church. It is only then, through our shared sorrow and our vision for the future that our tired spirits will be revived and true healing achieved.

Francis Sullivan