



Diocese of Port Pirie

Chancery

PO Box 1206, Port Pirie, Sth Australia, 5540
Email: diocoffice@pp.catholic.org.au

Phone: 08 8632 0550

Fax: 08 8632 0599

Lenten Pastoral Letter 2018 to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Earthen Vessels

Dear Sisters & Brothers in the Lord

As Lent continues the liturgy will urge us many times to repent, to allow our hearts to be converted. But of what, Lord, do we need to repent? We try our best. We are ordinary family people. We mostly honour our promises. We are mostly faithful in our commitments. We try to do the right thing. We have lived our marriage vows, and have tried to do so with integrity. Sometimes it hasn't worked out, but we have tried to be as genuine as we can. We keep space in our hearts for you, O Lord, and we partake of the Bread of Life. So what is this repentance?

Much of the above is very true, but we are earthen vessels, and earthen vessels can shatter. We know that when the Mass starts with "Lord, have mercy", we answer strongly and in full voice, "Christ, have mercy". So how to reconcile our obvious efforts at goodness with the sincerity with which we pray, "Lord, have mercy".

It is not as if the Lord is a fearsome God, threatening to destroy us, to punish us. We know of His unconditional love for us. God so loved us He sent His only Son. That is how important I am to Him, I know.

"Come to me all you who labour", Jesus said to us, "and I will give you rest". And You do, O Lord, You grace us with Your peace, especially at Communion time in Mass, a peace the world cannot give. So why this repentance language, and my need for the prayer "Lord, have mercy"?

It is because we are members of Your Body in the world. Baptism made us that, forever. Saint Paul said we make up in our bodies what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ. The only thing lacking was His physical extension, His living on into our times, into my time, on earth. How do we as members of Your Body, Your community of the baptised faithful, live in the world?

We ask what has happened to our Church that sinfulness has broken so much of its moral witness. What are we doing to ensure crimes against the innocent are no longer part of our story; is there enough we do to care for the victims? How do we work to restore credibility in the Church, this communion of my brothers and sisters who love Jesus? Are we working hard enough at it? Lord, have mercy. What are doing to remove the cloth of scandal that has obscured the face of Christ shining through His Church? Guide us, Lord. Teach us. Christ, have mercy.

There are times it seems our nation is drifting, like a vessel without a rudder, subject to winds it cannot resist. Pillars strengthening the family and society have been weakened, and our social context and justification seems no longer to draw upon the Gospel of Jesus; the environment of values is being set by other voices. The destruction of the unborn, the social permission to euthanise the frail, the renunciation of the truth we pray in our Creed, "Lord, giver of life". The basis of the family, a child being the fruit of a committed love between a man and a woman, has now been

replaced, still under the title of marriage, by forms of artificial parenting. We pray as a Christian community, "Lord, have mercy".

And then there is the Lenten exhortation, "harden not your hearts". We look at Manus Island, and Nauru, and the grossly disproportionate number of Aboriginal men in jail, and we need to pray, "Christ, have mercy".

We are good people. We know Christ is our Redeemer. We know He calls us to ever closer discipleship. "What you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did unto Me". Grant us the grace through this Lent, O Lord, to live your presence in our world as the Body of Christ, in a way of more active discipleship.

Let us pray to strengthen our hearts so our lives may be a positive ministry in the world. Let us read the Gospels for a few minutes each day and ponder them in our hearts, as we are told was Mary's practice when observing her Son.

And yet Lord you are our Father
We the clay, You the potter.
We are all the work of Your hands.

Visit this vine and protect it, the vine Your right hand has planted.

Lord have mercy.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ', written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

20th February 2018
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