



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Homily of Archbishop Mark Coleridge at Sala Regia

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge delivered the homily at the final Mass of the Vatican Summit on the Protection of Minors.

Here is the text of Archbishop Coleridge's homily.

In the Gospel just proclaimed, one voice alone is heard, the voice of Jesus. Earlier we heard the voice of Paul and at the end of Mass we will hear the voice of Peter, but in the Gospel there is only the voice of Jesus. It is good that, after all our words, there are now only the words of Christ: Jesus alone remains, as on the mount of the Transfiguration (cf Lk 9:36).

He speaks to us of power, and he does so in this splendid Sala Regia which also speaks of power. Here are images of battles, of a religious massacre, of struggles between emperors and popes. This is a place where earthly and heavenly powers meet, touched at times by infernal powers as well. In this Sala Regia the word of God invites us to contemplate power, as we have done through these days together. Between meeting, Sala and Scripture therefore we have a fine harmony of voices.

Standing over the sleeping Saul, David appears a powerful figure, as Abishai sees only too well: "Today God has put the enemy into your hands. So let me nail him to the ground with the spear". But David retorts: "Don't kill him! Who has ever laid a hand on the Lord's consecrated one and gone unpunished?" David chooses to use power not to destroy but to save the king, the Lord's anointed.

The pastors of the Church, like David, have received a gift of power – power however to serve, to create; a power that is with and for but not over; a power, as St Paul says, "which the Lord gave for building you up, not for destroying you" (2 Cor 10:8). Power is dangerous, because it can destroy; and in these days we have pondered how in the Church, power can turn destructive when separated from service, when it is not a way of loving, when it becomes power over.

A host of the Lord's consecrated ones have been placed in our hands – and by the Lord himself. Yet we can use this power not to create but to destroy, and even in the end to kill. In sexual abuse, the powerful lay hands on the Lord's consecrated ones, even the weakest and most vulnerable of them. They say yes to the urging of Abishai; and they seize the spear.

In abuse and its concealment, the powerful show themselves not men of heaven but men of earth, in the words of St Paul we have heard. In the Gospel, the Lord commands: "Love your enemies". But who is the enemy? Surely not those who have challenged the Church to see abuse and its concealment for what they really are, above all the victims and survivors who have led us to the painful truth by telling their stories with such courage. At times, however, we have seen victims and survivors as the enemy, but we have not loved them, we have not blessed them. In that sense, we have been our own worst enemy.

The Lord urges us to "be merciful as your Father is merciful". Yet, for all that we desire a truly safe Church and for all that we have done to ensure it, we have not always chosen the mercy of the man of heaven. We have, at times, preferred instead the indifference of the man of earth and the desire to protect the Church's reputation and even our own. We have shown too little mercy, and therefore we will receive the same, because the measure we give will be the measure we receive in return. We will not go unpunished, as David says, and we have already known punishment.

The man of earth must die so that the man of heaven can be born; the old Adam must give way to the new Adam. This will require a true conversion, without which we will remain on the level of "mere

administration” – as the Holy Father writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* – “mere administration” which leaves untouched the heart of the abuse crisis (25).

This conversion alone will enable us to see that the wounds of those who have been abused are our wounds, that their fate is our fate, that they are not our enemies but bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh (cf Gen 2:23). They are us, and we are them.

This conversion is in fact a Copernican revolution. Copernicus proved that the sun does not revolve around the earth but the earth around the sun. For us, the Copernican revolution is the discovery that those who have been abused do not revolve around the Church but the Church around them. In discovering this, we can begin to see with their eyes and to hear with their ears; and once we do that, the world and the Church begin to look very different. This is the necessary conversion, the true revolution and the great grace which can open for the Church a new season of mission.

Lord, when did we see you abused and did not come to help you? But he will reply: In truth I say to you, as often as you failed to do this to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters, you failed to do it to me (cf Matt 25:44-45). In them, the least of the brothers and sisters, victims and survivors, we encounter Christ crucified, the powerless one from whom there flows the power of the Almighty, the powerless one around whom the Church revolves forever, the powerless one whose scars shine like the sun.

In these days we have been on Calvary – even in the Vatican and in the Sala Regia we are on the dark mountain. In listening to survivors, we have heard Christ crying out in the darkness (cf Mk 15:34). And the cry has even become music. But here hope is born from his wounded heart, and hope becomes prayer, as the universal Church gathers around us in this upper room: may the darkness of Calvary lead the Church throughout the world to the light of Easter, to the Lamb who is the sun that never sets (cf Apoc 21:23).

In the end, there remains only the voice of the Risen Lord, urging us not to stand gazing at the empty tomb, wondering in our perplexity what to do next. Nor can we stay in the upper room where he says, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19). He breathes on us (cf Jn 20:22) and the fire of a new Pentecost touches us (cf Acts 2:2). He who is peace throws open the doors of the upper room and the doors of our heart. From fear is born an apostolic boldness, from deep discouragement the joy of the Gospel.

A mission stretches before us – a mission demanding not just words but real concrete action. We will do all we can to bring justice and healing to survivors of abuse; we will listen to them, believe them and walk with them; we will ensure that those who have abused are never again able to offend; we will call to account those who have concealed abuse; we will strengthen the processes of recruitment and formation of Church leaders; we will educate all our people in what safeguarding requires; we will do all in our power to make sure that the horrors of the past are not repeated and that the Church is a safe place for all, a loving mother especially for the young and the vulnerable; we will not act alone but will work with all concerned for the good of the young and the vulnerable; we will continue to deepen our own understanding of abuse and its effects, of why it has happened in the Church and what must be done to eradicate it. All of this will take time, but we do not have forever and we dare not fail.

If we can do this and more, we will not only know the peace of the Risen Lord but we will become his peace in a mission to the ends of the earth. Yet we will become the peace only if we become the sacrifice. To this we say yes with one voice as at the altar we plunge our failures and betrayals, all our faith, our hope, our love into the one sacrifice of Jesus, Victim and Victor, who “will wipe away the tears from every eye, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or weeping or pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Apoc 21:4).

Amen.