



No Catholic can ignore the depth of concern, pain, and anguish for the Catholic community in the light of charges against Cardinal George Pell. It is important that we exercise appropriate discernment as we consider the issues at stake: truth and justice for all concerned. The following homily reflections of Fr John McKinnon reflect my views and I commend them to you as a framework for consideration in the painful months ahead, as the law takes its course.

Fr Paddy Mugavin.

Considerations concerning charges against Cardinal George Pell



BY FR JOHN MCKINNON

I do not think that I can responsibly refrain from sharing where I am at in light of the summons to answer allegations of sexual abuse against minors served by the Victorian Police

on Cardinal Pell in Rome last Thursday. My heart goes out to the men who have made the allegations; to Cardinal Pell who has to answer them; even to the Police who laid the charges. More immediately, my heart goes out to you parishioners who have to work with people, and live and mix with them, some of whom will ridicule you, and others who will despise and attack the Church that you love.

No doubt many of you will have already made your own judgments about the guilt or innocence of Cardinal Pell. Personally, I leave judgment to the Court. I have been a priest for long enough and heard enough Confessions not to be surprised at anything that anyone is capable of doing. If the Cardinal is guilty, he is not the first Cardinal to be found so. If accusations are found unsubstantiated, the accusers are not the first in that situation. I simply do not know the truth. It will be the task of the Court to reach judgment. I certainly would not like to be one of the jurors. In the meantime, I have to be content to wait – and pray that truth will prevail.

We have all had a tough time over the past twenty years. Most of us were bewildered and deeply wounded by the statistics released recently tabling the incidence of sexual abuse by clergy in our Church: seven percent of priests found guilty of abusing; 4,400 young children over the past sixty years who have had the courage to tell the stories of their abuse to the Royal Commission. We do not know how many others were offended against but chose to remain silent.

How do we survive in this kind of Church? I feel

a bit like Peter when he said to Jesus, Lord, to whom else can we go?

It helps to be aware of and grateful for the enormous amount of good work done by so many people in the Church, which would never have been done without the motivation they have drawn from their belonging. The Church is not all bad – it is both bad and good, at the same time.

Yet, the question remains, how do we cope with our bewilderment, our hurt, our anger and sense of betrayal? We need to work at it.

Personally, I constantly draw hope from what St Paul had found out the hard way, too: God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him – “all things”, even sin! In the same Epistle to the Romans from which today’s Second Reading was taken, Paul also wrote, when reflecting on the outcome of the death of Jesus, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more. I do trust that the Church can come out of this shameful trial a purified Church, a humbler Church, a better Church, a safer Church. In some ways, that is already happening.

But, in the meantime, how do I live with the deep burden of sorrow that I carry? Jesus said, The kingdom of God is close at hand. However, to see it, we all need a new way of seeing, of understanding – what he referred to by the deceptively translated word repent. I keep being challenged, to say the least, by the last of Jesus’ Beatitudes as listed by St Luke, Blessed are you when people hate you, ... abuse you, denounce your name ... on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and dance for joy “Blessed are you!” That is counter-intuitive stuff that only makes sense when we in some way have personally encountered Jesus. For most of us, it is not something that we can reason ourselves into but that comes with taking time to pray.

If some of you, or others you know, are really finding it hard, do feel free to come and have a yarn with Fr Paddy or with me.



STATEMENT FROM CARDINAL GEORGE PELL IN ROME

Good morning to you all. I want to say one or two brief words about my situation. These matters have been under investigation now for two years. There have been leaks to the media. There has been relentless character assassination — relentless character assassination — and for more than a month, claims that a decision on whether to lay charges was imminent.

I'm looking forward, finally, to having my day in court. I'm innocent of these charges. They are false. The whole idea of sexual abuse is abhorrent to me.

I've kept Pope Francis — the Holy Father — regularly informed during these long months. I have spoken to him on a number of occasions in the last week, I think most recently, a day or so ago.

We talked about my need to take leave to clear my name. So I'm very grateful to the Holy Father for giving me this leave to return to Australia. I've spoken to my lawyers about when this will be necessary. And I've spoken to my doctors about the best way to achieve this.

All along, I have been completely consistent and clear in my total rejection of these allegations. News of these charges strengthens my resolve, strengthens my resolve. And court proceedings now offer me an opportunity to clear my name and then return here back to Rome to work.

Thank you.

STATEMENT FROM SPOKESMAN FROM THE HOLY SEE



The Holy See has learned with regret the news of charges filed against Cardinal George Pell for decades-old actions that have been attributed to him.

Having become aware of the charges, Cardinal Pell — acting in full respect of civil laws — has decided to return to his country to face the charges against him, recognising the importance of his participation to ensure that the process is carried out fairly and to foster the search for truth.

The Holy Father — having been informed by Cardinal Pell — has granted the Cardinal a leave of absence so he can defend himself.

During the prefect's absence, the Secretariat for the Economy will continue to carry out its institutional tasks.

The secretaries will remain at their posts to carry forward the ordinary affairs of the dicastery.

The Holy Father, who has appreciated Cardinal

Pell's honesty during his three years of work in the Roman Curia, is grateful for his collaboration and, in particular, for his energetic dedication to the reforms in the economic and administrative sector, as well as his active participation in the Council of Cardinals, the C-9.

The Holy See expresses its respect for the Australian justice system, which will have to decide the merits of the questions raised.

At the same time, it is important to recall that Cardinal Pell has openly and repeatedly condemned as immoral and intolerable the acts of abuse committed against minors.

He has cooperated in the past with Australian authorities, for example, in his depositions before the royal commission, has supported the pontifical commission for the protection of minors, and finally — as a diocesan bishop in Australia — has introduced systems and procedures both for the protection of minors and to provide assistance to victims of abuse.