The Wounds of Sexual Abuse

Fr Gerry Murphy
6th & 7th April 2024

"Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe."

That's what Thomas says to the Apostles after he missed the appearance of the Risen Jesus. "Peace be with you", says Jesus to Thomas when he appeared to him 8 days later. 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side."

It's not just about believing in the resurrection of Jesus, but rather believing in a Risen Jesus who still has words.

Why is there such a massive emphasis on the wounds of the Risen Jesus? It's because we're part of a world that still suffers so horribly. It's because we're part of a Church that still commits serious sins against the little ones – the children – and the weaker adults. We believe the Church is the Body of Christ now, but you would sometimes never know it because of the sins it commits.

One of the most obvious sins of the Church is that of sexual abuse. It's been inflicted mostly by priests and also by bishops covering up their crimes. It's a wound that makes us all deeply ashamed. It's a wound the Church trying to address. Only last week, the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors, issued new guidelines. They require every diocese and every religious order throughout the whole Catholic world to have clear safeguarding guidelines and procedures that are publicly accessible. They insist that all reports of sexual abuse should be reported to the civil authorities and the police.
It continues a ZERO TOLERANCE APPROACH TO ABUSE.

All priests and church workers are now screened and trained. Every parish now has a trained safeguarding representative. Sue Thornhill is our Rep in Chapel and Margaret Swift in Buxton. Everyone who works with children, Eucharistic Ministers who take Holy Communion to the sick and housebound, and parish visitors are required to have a DBS check every 3 years. There's been a massive change at every level in the Catholic Church.

It's hard to look the serious sins of the Church in the eye and still remain in it, despite all. I hope my highlighting what every parish is now doing, gives you some hope and heart.
Zero tolerance is the watchword. It's not just a PR exercise, window dressing, but genuine repentance, a real desire to put things right for the present and the future. And we're trying to support victims and survivors. When you look at the big picture, what we all treasure most, are the children of the parish community. They pick us up, they give us hope.

We're holding a Day of Prayer in Buxton in 2 weeks' time on 23rd April, 12noon until 9:00pm. Bishop Patrick is coming for a service at 7:00pm. Fr Dominic Allain, from London, who's experienced in this field, is joining us for the whole day. There will be public prayer at 12:00, 3:00 and 5:00pm, all sorts of prayer – Stations, The Rosary, the testimony of survivors and time for personal prayer.

St Anne's has its own special wounds about one previous parish priest, Paul Cullen, who was here in 1978 – 87. Some of us were here then and knew him personally. Some of us read about his trial and prison sentence in The Buxton Advertiser in Feb 2014. He died in prison in 2018. We have feelings of betrayal, of let-down, of shame.

I want to ask you all to make an effort to come to the Day of Prayer.

The journey to healing is a hard one, a long one, but making the journey together is so much better. It's tempting to forget about it, sweep it under the carpet, but it keeps reappearing.

Think about it in light of today's gospel:

Jesus said to Thomas "put your fingers here and put your hands here".

Let's have the courage to take that step together. It will bring some healing, some peace, some hope.