

Submission to the Plenary Council consultative process by a parishioner who was unable to attend the dialogue session.

11/11/2018

The question posed in the Parish Newsletter is: "What do you think God is asking of Australia at this time?" This is not the same question as posed on the Council's website, which is: "What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?" The insertion of the word "us" could simply emphasise that the question is to all Australians about all Australians. On the other hand the word "us" could signify all Catholics, or even, more narrowly, all Catholics who attend Church "regularly". It would be helpful if we all answered the same interpretation of the question.

I will assume that the question refers to all Catholics, of whom about 10% attend Church regularly. In this sense, the question probes what it means for the majority "outside" the Church, when they think about God asking them to be or do something. It is not a question about being Church, because they, the majority, are not aligned with the formal expressions of Church. As I am not one of the majority, I would find it difficult to answer for them.

As a member of the 10% "Church goers", the question can be answered at two levels: individually, and as a member of a group.

Individually, I think God is asking us to behave as Micah (6:8) advocated: "act justly; love tenderly; walk humbly with your God."

As a member of the Church, I think God is asking us to envision a new style of Church that gives priority to companionship not clericalism; to partnerships not priestly power and privilege; to mutuality not unilateral authority; to service not self-reference; to compassion not control.

Recently, the independent professional and forensic examination of the Catholic Church in Australia, by the Royal Commission into the sexual abuse of minors, concluded that the Church's major need is to rid itself of the culture of clericalism. This is the first and most fundamental thing God is asking us to do, because that culture alone determines what flourishes and what dies in what we call "Church". Until and unless a new order of things is established, we can only expect ongoing disappointment and frustration.

I think God is asking us to place all our resources at the disposal of those who can create a genuine, Gospel-inspired, alternative to the sad and sorry clericalist model of Church that has been allowed to develop, not only un-checked, but also nurtured from within, to become the scandal it currently is.

Micah's vision contains the seeds of the Church we seek, and in the words of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you", we have the simple but often un-developed culture that can nurture the vision into reality.

Without a vision the people perish. Without a healthy culture, the vision perishes.

God is asking "us" not to be distracted by the plethora of wishes and wants, but rather to attend to the field which holds the treasure. The treasure is within our grasp ---- if we are free to believe and act in new ways.