

“Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn”

These words are from the reading of the Prophet Joel 2:13 during the Ash Wednesday Mass at the beginning of Lent. As Easter is about to happen, I would like to go back to those words from Joel.

The background to these words is a call for lamentation and prayer as the country, Judah, had been laid waste from an invasion of locusts.

Over the past five years we have seen our Church laid waste from within by those who were not faithful to their calling to protect the weak and vulnerable, destroying young lives, tearing their garments and hearts apart. There has been lament and sorrow for what has happened to survivors, their families, and you who love your Faith. As a Catholic community, we have had to listen to stories where people’s lives and hearts have been destroyed. Where our Church’s leadership has been challenged, due to their inability to deal with what was happening within our Church. Yet, there were those who struggled to change this behaviour and were a light in the darkness for our Church.

Lent in 2018 was a call for lamentation, prayer and fasting in reparation for what has happened. What has happened to people’s lives cannot be changed and for that I am sorry. I don’t just stay with my sorrow but seek to ensure our Church is again a place centred on ‘changing hearts’, not ‘tearing people’s lives apart’.

Lent is a time of Grace and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To be open to the Spirit over these 40 days deepens our relationship with God, recognising utter dependence upon God through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Lent is not meant to make us feel badly about who we are, but seeks a change of heart, a change of thinking and to building up the lives of others and not tearing them apart.

Lent prepares people of Faith for the great mystery and beauty of Easter. Our God calls us not to live with despondency and despair. Easter reminds us God does not abandon us, even in the dark times, giving us a new vision of how to live in harmony and respect for all people.

Lent this year has been a challenge for me reflecting on where we go as a Church community after the Royal Commission. Yet it has been a journey of Grace and renewal. For our Church I would hope that we would recognise and understand the words from the Prophet Joel, “Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn”.

Bishop Michael