

WHY ARE WE STILL HERE?

Down the years I have tried on several occasions to have a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*—usually fruitless. My most recent effort, also fruitless, was a response to the following letter of February 28th:

In view of the ongoing scandals enveloping the Catholic Church worldwide, my admiration for its loyal followers knows no bounds (“Conclave may come early under shadow of Cardinal’s departure”, February 27). Against all odds, they continue to display two character traits that alas, of late, this unbelieving outsider is sorely lacking: patience and tolerance. —Max Fletcher, Scarborough.

My (unpublished) response read:

It is not patience and tolerance, Max Fletcher (Letters, February 28), that keeps us ‘Churched’ people hanging in there in the face of the scandals enveloping the Catholic Church. God help us, we can be as lacking in those virtues as anyone. It is faith in the institutional Church founded on Peter, the ‘Rock’, against which the forces of Hades will not prevail (Matthew 16.18). —Dr Barry Brundell MSC

The editors, quite understandably, do not give reasons for not publishing readers’ letters, so I am left to draw my own conclusions. I suspect that they consider theology to be too challenging for their readers—a patronising attitude that we at *Compass* do not have towards our readers!

At a time like this, when our Church is having a very rough ride. We are feeling damaged by the sexual abuse crisis, we are feeling devastated by the suffering of those who have been abused, and mortified by what has been done by some of our own members, and the Catho-phobes are in full cry. We are feeling the force of the power of evil at work within the Church as well as without.

Thank God, as I tried to affirm in my letter to the editor, we are not asked to rely on ourselves and our own resources, be they resources of patience and tolerance, or whatever other resources we may have, to keep us hanging in there. We are asked to rely on the power of God. It is God who builds God’s Church. We note what Jesus said: ‘on this Rock I will build *my* Church’. And it is God who makes it strong against all the forces of evil. Hence the sound advice of St Paul: ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’ (1Cor. 1.31.)

The experience will teach us just how much we have to rely on God and not on ourselves—a valuable lesson, humbling and therefore good for us. As the NSW bishops wrote in their Lenten pastoral letter, *Sowing in Tears*: ‘Though the Church in Australia may weep through the course of the Royal Commission, it is our prayer that she will emerge humbler and holier’.

Learning humility is a painful experience. If it is Christian humility that is being learnt, and not just a loss of face that is being endured, it is a form of dying in order to rise to fuller life, it is our following of Christ who humbled himself, taking on the form of a slave, in order to rescue us and open up the way for us to come to the Father. Hence there is much talk of hope in the present crisis.

One of the symbols of the Church in early Church art is the Barque of Peter. The Church as the Barque of Peter rides over the rough waters, is buffeted by strong winds but does not sink. The very fact that this was a popular image of the Church in the early centuries reminds us that the Church has passed through many turbulent times down the years and has, by the grace and power of God, survived them all.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.