

Archdiocesan Women's Taskforce Reflection Afternoon Sharing

Sat 29th Aug 2020

I'm Brigid, 22, a Canberra girl through and through. I've been Catholic all my life and I'm from an amazing family of seven. I've got Mum and Dad, two big sisters, and older brother and a younger brother. I currently live with my sister, her husband and their two bubs and its good and chaotic and full of joy.

I'm here today to share a little bit of my life and how I'm trying to figure out who God wants me to be and what that looks like in our Church.

You're probably wondering what qualifies me to talk about that and honestly, I do to! I'm currently studying to be a high school history and religion teacher, splitting my time between ANU and ACU. I also work for ACU as a Student Ministry Assistant, so I help lead our little Campus Ministry crew to run small groups, retreat session, and be a welcoming faith-based community on campus that people can be a part of.

I've been involved in youth and young adult ministry in the Church since precious 16-year-old me signed up to be a part of my school's youth ministry team, and six year later I'm still passionate about sharing the gospel with my peers. I was a volunteer for Youth Mission Team in 2017 and 2018, in Wollongong and Sydney respectively, and I'm also part of a team of leaders who run a high school youth group at St Benedict's in Narrabundah.

Straight after high school I volunteered with Youth Mission Team. Together with a bunch of other young men and women I lived a full-on ministry focused life of prayer, community and evangelisation. For some people mission looks like digging wells in Africa, but for us retreat days and youth groups were our wells and Catholic high schools were our Africa.

One really vital and powerful part of our ministry was testimonies. Members of our team would get up and share about how God had changed their lives and it was always the best part of every day.

The only problem was, I *hated* doing it. I did team twice and my whole first year I dreaded standing up and sharing my testimony. It was a mix of things – I'm always a bit nervy in front of a crowd, especially if I have to share personal stuff. I didn't think I was the right type of Catholic girl – not bubbly enough or fun enough. I also never felt like I had a good enough story.

I thought I needed a really good, relatable, dramatic conversion story about how Jesus personally intervened and turned my life around. I thought I needed to be like Saint Paul going blind and getting trampled by a horse for people to listen to me.

When I did team again in 2018, my manager said to me "Brigid you're gonna have to figure out how to do this otherwise you'll hate it for the rest of your life. Just think about the parts of life that suck and how God pulled you out of it".

As I tried to rewrite my testimony so that it sounded good enough, I thought of this incredible quote from St Augustine. He says, "In my deepest wound, I saw your glory, and it astounded me".

My deepest wounds were that I've always had to be the mum friend, and I feel like I have to have it all together all the time otherwise I'll ruin mine and everyone else's lives. I hated the pressure to be strong, and I felt like if anyone could see how hard I was trying to keep my head

above water they'd be let down. I saw God's astounding glory when everything in my life fell apart and I had to let God be the strong one for once.

Once I recognise how God had worked in my life I was able to share what He has done for me so that others could know His love too. I believe that God gives us graces in our wounds so that others can find hope in the same darkness. God has given me His heart for girls like me who feel trapped by the pressure to keep it all together. As I continue to journey with God, I'll find His glory in more wounds and I might be drawn to other parts of His heart. But for now, my place is to listen to young women who carry the weight of the world on their shoulders and share how God carried my burdens so that they can share theirs with Him too.

As I continue to find my place in the Church, I've found myself really drawn to grow in relationship with the Saints. I love saints – they remind us that we aren't alone, and that others have found a way to God in the winding roads of life.

I've found comfort in the intercession of many of the powerful female saints of our tradition. I'm named after Saint Brigid because she prayed for me and my mum when there were pregnancy complications before I was born. Saint Rita – patron saint of the impossible – helped move mountains so that I could be on mission in 2018. And I've found deep comfort and friendship in Saint Martha, of Mary and Martha, her story and prayers have helped me to release the idea that service is a way of earning love, and instead embrace a charism of hospitality and sisterhood that I would never have found on my own.

The most powerful thing about saints is that they often become patrons of the things they've struggled with most – not what they found easy. It's in their wounds too, that God is glorified.

St John Vianney is a patron of study, even though he really struggled with academics. Venerable Matt Talbot was an alcoholic most of his life, and now he sits in heaven praying for those who struggle too. St Therese of Lisieux is the patron of missionaries and she couldn't even leave the convent.

When I grow up, I want to be a patron saint. I want to be a patron saint of youth ministers, or history teachers, of teenage girls. I also want to be a patron saint of depression and anxiety, of self-esteem issues, and perfectionists. It's in *those wounds* that I have encountered the depths of God's love for me, and it is there that He is glorified in my life. My passions and my pains are a part of who God created me to be, and they are essential to the Church.

I'm passionate about making the Church better. I'm passionate about inviting as many people as possible to make a home here. And I'm passionate about the fact that our Church, as individuals and as a community, is called to a profound holiness so that we can be saints.

Because I'm passionate about my faith – not just my relationship with Jesus – but the beauty of my Catholic-ness and our traditions, I jumped at the opportunity to be involved in the upcoming Plenary Council. When it was announced a few years ago I wasn't sure what to expect, so I made my friend come with me to one of the first listening sessions in our Archdiocese. The room was buzzing and full of people with big ideas and it was a beautiful thing to hear the hopes and experiences of others. We were also the youngest people there by like 40 years. It was then that I realised how important my voice could be if I let God use me to speak about what matters.

I feel genuinely called to be a part of the reform and renewal of our Church. And I feel called not to be a hypocrite – I've always complained that there aren't enough chances for diverse voices

to be heard in the Church and it wouldn't be great if I didn't show up the one time they decide to let us speak. I feel like being involved in the Plenary Council is a part of me claiming my place in the Church. Not the Church of the future, not the Church of my parents, but *my Church*. The Church of now. It has been a really long process of realising that I have important things to say, *and* that when I listen others feel heard and understood. Dialogue goes both ways.

Dialogue is at times a difficult process; it has brought me out of my echo chambers and has challenged me to see the truth and pure intentions of people whose thoughts I disagree with. It's humbling. There are plenty of people with more experience, degrees and authority than me, but by virtue of my baptism I am called to walk with others as a part of the living, thriving, messy and complicated family that is my Church.

My hope is that the Plenary Council can be like a trip to the physio – we'll be twisted and crunched in weird ways to realign with the Kingdom of God. And then we'll all go home and have to do the stretches and exercises that keep us in the right place. I want our church to be humbler, holier, and more whole. And I really think we can do it if we let the love of God and our neighbours underpin everything we do. Every breath we take is an action of our heavenly father, and when we hold Him and each other close we bring heaven to earth.