

Spotlight Comments – Laura Bradley

"If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one" – Phil Saviano, Spotlight

If you are unsure if you want to see this film, I would encourage you to see it.

We know Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and this is a film about truth, a very uncomfortable truth that needs to be acknowledged, reflected and acted upon.

The Spotlight film makes it clear that the victims of child sexual abuse were let down by so many in the community. The Catholic Church, police officers, lawyers, administrators, family members, and other reporters had all failed to stop this abuse sooner.

It is clear that the respect for the Church and the clergy initially got in the way of anyone jumping up and down and demanding justice, action, adequate compensation and change.

When a Spotlight journalist asks a survivor what happened when the Bishop came over to speak to his mother he responds in disgust "she put out cookies!"

Robby head of the Spotlight investigation team is sick with guilt when he realises he'd been given the facts associated with the story eight years earlier. The only comfort his boss can reassure him with is: "Sometimes it's easy to forget that we spend most of our time stumbling around in the dark. Then someone turns a light on and there's plenty of blame to go around."

Journalist Mike Rezendes' character is rightly harsh on the church for its actions, and inactions, but also reveals the spiritual damage caused by the scandal to others:

"I actually really loved going to church as a kid. I really thought that one day I'd go back and I was holding on to that. They took that from me."

It made me think about how many have left the Church as a result of this scandal and will they ever be able to come back? Especially heartbreaking were the stories of survivors - how they were preyed upon by predator priests, often (but not always) the victims were fatherless and poor. As victims got older the film showed the mental battle of trying to substitute the pain of the sexual abuse with drugs, drink or suicide. "When you're a poor kid from a poor neighbourhood and the priest pays attention to you it's a big deal – how do you say no to God?" Explains Phil Saviano whose character is the leader of the SNAP victim's network – the SNAP acronym stands for Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

The spiritual destruction of the faith of the victims is highlighted in the film – how could you ever trust a priest again after something like that happens to you and your family? What impact does that have on your spiritual life and how you connect to God?

"It's not just physical abuse it's spiritual abuse" explains character Phil Saviano.

The film shows the devastating wound from the scandal not only for the victims but the journalists, and how it impacts their ability to worship and pray.

At the same time the movie was inspiring, you are left with hope that the story has finally been told that this will bring faster change, better systems, and accountability.

Yes it is challenging to see on the big screen, the Church I love, that I work for, that I believe in, that has guided me in life provided for me spiritually and intellectually, the many wonderful priests who

serve our communities - to see the Church raw and ugly like that stuffing up in such a big way and to have that shown to everyone in such a public space as the cinema is difficult but we must listen, watch and reflect.

Emphasised is the fact that it took an outsider of the Catholic faith, a Jewish editor from another city to ask the questions and push hard to uncover the story – this made me think about the importance of interfaith dialogue, sometimes it takes an outsider to shine the spotlight on us and demand accountability and change where it is needed.