

July 19, 2007 - Saint Paul the blind [Did the Vatican know?]

By Paul Kent, The Daily Telegraph (AU)

THE image is a woman standing on steps. She is holding her hands to her head, anguished, as tears roll down her face.

She was young once, and whole, until she put her faith in the one place where it was supposed to be safest. She was never the same again.

She is Esther Miller, an American woman who with some 507 others this week was awarded \$756 million following a lawsuit against the Roman Catholic Diocese of LA.

The millions are compensation for the sick acts child-molesting priests performed in their role as God's servants.

The payout was a landmark, not only because it has rattled the Catholic Church all the way to its crumbling foundations, but because it took four years to come and is more than six times any previous deal struck by the church.

As in, any previous deal struck by the church to hush up their crimes and save the church its reputation.

They would buy a victim's silence, under the cover of night, they would move the offending priest to another parish where he would be free to turn his terrible ways on a fresh batch of innocents.

This is the great shame of the Catholic Church - a safe haven for rapists and child molesters. A place where, under the cloak of celibacy, unable to form normal adult relationships, with a kind word and black heart, they would direct their attention to the young.

It has been going on too long.

Meanwhile, as the 508 had their victory in Los Angeles, another battle was going on in another part of the world.

It seems almost trivial in comparison. Just last week it was reported Vatican officials are hoping to include the survival of Formula One driver Robert Kubica in a list of possible miracles performed by the late Pope John Paul II.

Kubica was born in the former Pope's home town of Krakow and recently walked away from a major accident in the Canadian Grand Prix with nothing more than concussion.

He had "Pope John Paul II" painted on his helmet.

If recognised, it would be the second miracle needed for the canonisation of the late pontiff.

What's telling, for Esther Miller and the others who stood alongside her on the steps, many of them clutching pictures of themselves as children, showing the world what they looked like when evil preyed on them, is that much of their abuse occurred while Pope John Paul II was pontiff.

It raises a question that each will answer according to their own experience.

If you assume that John Paul knew of the rapes when they were occurring, how can he ever be sainted?

If he did not know, then why was he kept in the dark?

The most believable assumption is that he did know.

Some believe the smoking gun is a letter Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote to all Catholic bishops in May 2001.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is now Pope Benedict XVI.

His letter was sent to all Catholic bishops and made clear that their investigations into claims of child sexual abuse were subject to the pontifical secret - to leak details was to risk excommunication.

In other words, no matter what horrors the investigations uncovered, the findings were not to be reported to police until after they were presented to the church.

Regardless of the outcome, the very existence of the investigation - and the church's later estimation that child sexual abuse was no worse in the Catholic Church than in the rest of society, puts John Paul in a tough situation.

Would he have known? Would a Pope dare conceal such things?

As John Paul's long-serving doctrinal adviser, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger worked closely with the Pope for more than 20 years, so it is difficult to believe it wasn't mentioned.

Meanwhile, in another part of the world, their voices echo all the way to Rome.

"I don't want (Los Angeles Cardinal Roger) Mahony going around saying everything is all right, because it's not," said Rita Milla, another of the abused who stood on the steps.

"My church acted like it didn't know what was happening."

As they consider the canonisation of John Paul II you have to ask, at the very least, how can any man be considered for sainthood while this was happening under his watch?

If nothing else, shouldn't the prevention of this evil have been his miracle?