

HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN
FRIDAY, 26 JULY 2019
ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL
CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMUNITY – CELEBRATING NAIDOC WEEK

Readings

Book of Exodus 20: 1-17

Gospel Matthew 13: 18-23

Welcome everybody to this Mass. I am aware that some of you have come from a great distance within the Archdiocese to be here today. Thank you so much for your efforts.

In this Mass, we particularly pray with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander friends. I am drawn to the theme of this year's NAIDOC week, "VOICE. TREATY. TRUTH. Let's work together for a shared future."

I think this is one of the great challenges in Australia – we must work together more fully for a shared future with our First Australians – who have been here for well over 50 or 60 thousand years and for us who have arrived in recent centuries.

Although some progress has been made, we still have a long, long way to go. When I look at the statistics with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hardship, in particular with health, attendance in Prisons, infant mortality, and so on, we still have a very long way to go.

Therefore, we do need to "work together for a shared future."

The Gospel today indicates Jesus offering us the image of the sower who throws out the seed of the Gospel in a very generous way.

The seeds of God, which challenge us to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have been thrown over this new but ancient land for over two hundred years. It is quite clear that a lot of the seeds have fallen on rocky ground, producing nothing. However, other seeds have fallen on fertile ground and have produced a marvellous harvest of generosity, compassion and practical charity.

Let the seeds of God's love fall upon us in this Mass and may these seeds find fertile soil in our hearts. I do not mean this in some sort of magical or poetic way. I mean it in a very practical way with regard to working towards bridging the gap between what most of us share and what a lot of us do not share in this land of wealth, particularly in our Aboriginal Communities.

It is incredible to think that over two hundred years after European settlement in this land that so many of our First Australians still feel alienated from their land.

I think the Catholic Church has and will continue to make a particular contribution here.

I remember years ago, how I was honoured to be a Priest Chaplain at an Aboriginal retreat. There were perhaps 30 or 40 First Australians and only a couple of non-Aboriginal people. During the week, I started to learn more and more about the genius of this ancient and living culture of our First Australians.

Two areas where I think Christians, and Catholics in particular, can make a great contribution with our First Australians are the following:

First, all of us do share a common spiritual foundation. In my time away with the Aboriginal people and the many times since I have quite easily seen the great spiritual bridge between our various cultures. Aboriginal people are spiritual in their DNA as indeed are we Catholic Christians. There is a mystical and a transcendent reality that we both share. This is a seed falling on fertile ground. It is something in the years ahead that we can build upon and a bridge that can draw us together.

Secondly, there is family life. In both our "cultures", we find the importance of family life and kinship bonds with clan and family members.

In the First Reading today from the Book of Exodus, we have the Ten Commandments. In a sense, they are like a treaty between God and us. So much of the Ten Commandments are set in an environment of family life, respect for elders and honouring God in our midst as family.

Today in the Catholic Church, we also celebrate the Saints Joachim and Anne. These are the parents of Mary. This means that they are the grandparents of Jesus. Although not mentioned in the Bible, soon after in the early centuries of Christianity their names became articulated and their role in the gift of Mary the mother of God to the Church was honoured. We all have parents and grandparents. We honour them, we thank them and we show respect to them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a tremendously deep love of family and particularly parents and grandparents.

This surely is a bridge we can use to draw us together and in coming closer, we can offer something more to the wider society of Australia. The wider Australia today seems to be lacking more and more with regard to the importance of family life. Everybody seems to be an individual separated from each other. This is not good for peace in society. Society comes through the family. Christian and the Aboriginal culture know this.

Therefore, there are two great challenges for us in the times ahead. Let us come closer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people particularly by developing stronger bridges in areas of spiritual life and family life. We do not have to wait until we are grown up to do this. We can do it now.

I am particularly encouraged to know that perhaps up to 400 students in our education system are from Aboriginal backgrounds. I hope there will be many more in the years ahead.

I think the present generation of adults still have so far to go with regard to Aboriginal reconciliation. But you, my dear young boys and girls, not only in the future but now can do all you can to create a new culture of tenderness and reconciliation as all of us together, especially in this Mass try to "work together for a shared future."