

## THE LOVE OF GOD EMPOWERING US TO OVERCOME RACISM & DISCRIMINATION

*Holy Trinity Sunday ~ 7 June 2020*



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### GREETINGS TO ALL

Greetings to all who share today in this celebration of the Eucharist.

Greetings to Ravina and Hanar who have been invited to join us today.

During this COVID-19 Pandemic, as a parish community, we have tried to be safe and connected.

Livestreaming Sunday Mass has been an important way of staying safe and connected in faith and in action. It gives us an opportunity to ponder a different perspective each Sunday.

Today we focus on our response to racism.

We read at some length, a church teaching on racism.

And we share a dream from a persecuted minority in Iraq, and prayers, symbols and solidarity from Australia.

### GOSPEL OF JOHN 3:16-18

In the first part of today's Gospel we hear:

*'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.  
'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but in order that the world might be saved through him.'*

The passage does not say only some races.

The passage does not say only some ethnic groups.

On this *Trinity Sunday* we profess our belief in the love of God for all of us, and our need for continual conversion.

## RACISM AND THE CONVERSION OF THE HUMAN HEART

Let us go back to the Pastoral Letter of the Australian Bishops in 1988, titled *“Racism and the Conversion of the Human Heart”*

We recall some of the insights in that teaching.

- *‘At both the personal and communal level fear is one of the main factors leading to racist attitudes and behaviour. What could we fear from building bridges between races instead of high, almost insurmountable walls?’*
- *As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*
- *Racial acceptance is given the highest priority in theory, but in practice it is far too frequently violated.*
- *Racism can be defined as discrimination or prejudice against a race or races resulting from the belief that a particular race, especially one’s own, is superior to others.*
- *Racial prejudice can stem from the fear of losing something that another may want. It can stem from the proud assertion that one’s own race is the best. Fear and pride make it only too easy to prejudge, categorise, keep people out, and violate the rights of others.*
- *Racist behaviour expresses itself in exploitation, or the attempt to use people of other races in a way that suits ourselves and not them; in discrimination, or treating some people worse than others because of their racial characteristics; in aggression, verbal and physical; in stereotyping, or holding to fixed ideas about what people from other races must be like; in scapegoating, or allowing others to bear the blame for disharmonies; and in offensive language, or a choice of words that can put down instead of lift up or state simply the way things are.*
- *Racism lies behind some of the housing and renting problems faced by certain individuals and groups in the community. It also manifests itself in the fact that the imprisonment rate is many times greater for Aboriginal people than for others and in the comparatively high infant mortality rate among Aborigines. And it is present when our society takes inadequate measures to eliminate the disadvantages experienced in such areas as employment, education, the courts, social welfare, politics and even in some forms of religious practice and parish life by those who speak little or no English.*
- *Although history shows us that tensions between races are common they are certainly not inevitable.’*

The Pastoral Letter went on to reflect on a Christian response to racism:

- *‘In the New Testament some of Christ’s strongest and most powerful statements related to the inclusion of all people, to giving a place to those whom others preferred to exclude, and to being open to dialogue with every individual and group in his society. He was not concerned so much with the external or with appearances but with allowing the emergence of the beauty that is within and in which the whole person is contained. The final messages of Christ were commands to include all nations in what was his legacy: to spread joyful and good news, and to wish all people well, in other words to love others.*

- *It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to acknowledge and address the issue of racism prepared by a true change of heart and with a resolution for practical action in the years ahead.'*

The Letter was written before the second Mabo ruling from the High Court, and during an immigration debate in Australia.

It offered recommendations including:

- *'Affirm multicultural Australia, making it clear that we believe that our society provides the opportunity for groups of people with different cultural backgrounds and identities to live in harmony.*
- *Consciously opt for the elimination of racism by every means, especially education.*
- *Take every opportunity to learn from the original inhabitants of our land and their descendants.*
- *Refuse to countenance all forms of injustice and discrimination towards the Aboriginal people.*
- *Seriously and objectively evaluate the contribution of our immigrants.*
- *Change attitudes which have given so much offence to people of Asian origin during this year's immigration debate.*
- *Take every opportunity in our daily contacts and conversations to learn about and rejoice in the cultural riches of one another.*
- *Firmly opt for solidarity between all of Australia's inhabitants by individually and communally responding to a call to conversion based on hope, promise and love, and to reconciliation with people of every race living in our country.*
- *Recognise that humanity will never achieve the full unity desired by Christ until it learns to transcend barriers formed by racial difference and to accept the spirit of St. Paul's words: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians 3:28)*
- *Pray that we will all achieve in our own lives that conversion of heart which will lead to the elimination of racist attitudes; and that all people of good will may be open to such conversion.'*

#### SAINT POPE JOHN PAUL II

On the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2001, in his [Angelus address](#), Saint Pope John Paul II reminded us that:

*'Every upright conscience cannot but decisively condemn any racism, no matter in what heart or place it is found.*

*Unfortunately it emerges in ever new and unexpected ways, offending and degrading the human family.*

*Racism is a sin that constitutes a serious offence against God.'*

#### SCRIPTURE

The Readings today are for Trinity Sunday.

[Three years ago in our parish on Trinity Sunday](#) we affirmed:

- The dynamic loving relationship in God between the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

- Today we can name this relationship as a communion of love, a *communio*, a Trinitarian communion, a spirituality of communion.

- From John's Gospel we learn that we are called **into** that communion.
- We are invited **into** the love of God, strengthened and blessed.
- From the Old Testament, we hear that we are created in the image and likeness of God.
- From Jesus we see God as a parent, Father. We are family.

- John's Gospel leads us **into** the mystery of communion.

14:20 *"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."*

- We gain insight when Jesus says of himself

14:6 *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."*

- Each of us finds our way, truth, meaning and life in Jesus.

- Of the Holy Spirit, John 14 says

14:16 *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."*

14:17 *"This is the Spirit of truth ... "*

- We pray to the *Holy Spirit - the Advocate, the Paraclete* - to guide us and strengthen our resolve.

- Eventually we gain insight into the mystery of God as Trinity, in love, dynamic loving.

- And we are invited not only to love God and be loved by God, but also to be in love with God, to dwell in love, now and into the future."

With the grace of God's love, the unjust barriers of racism and discrimination can be broken down.

We can build bridges of hope.

We can be in solidarity.

Let us look at some examples of breaking barriers and being in solidarity by *enabling a dream to come to reality*, and by *symbols of solidarity*.

#### **BUILDING BRIDGES IN IRAQ - SOLIDARITY WITH AUSTRALIA**

##### **+ A DREAM**

In 2009, some parishes in the five dioceses in Queensland offered to participate in a prayer campaign by taking their turn on a roster to pray for a week.

The prayer was in solidarity with the Christians in Iraq who were suffering from racism, religious discrimination and persecution. And the prayer was for peace for all people in Iraq.

One of the Queensland priests would email to Iraq, a monthly list of the names and description of the parishes praying that month.

After a few months, he visited Iraq and saw the deep faith and the richness of cultures, and the persecution and suffering of the people.

A Chaldean priest in Erbil, Fr Bashar Warda shared his dream for the future. He spoke of the many challenges to survival and of the need to offer hope. He envisaged various nations and agencies supporting the dream, each with a task.

He asked if it would be possible for the Church in Australia to offer scholarships for local men and women, already with Bachelor Degrees, who could come to Australia to undertake Masters degrees in education and health, before returning to Iraq to help build up the nation and the church.

Education and Health have been traditional services and expertise which his people have offered the whole country for such a long time in history. It has been one of their strengths and a way of building bridges.

Some months later, back in Brisbane, Australia, Alan Druery, an educational professional, Sister Bernadette as the Provincial of the Holy Spirit Sisters, and Australian Catholic University Brisbane campus would invite others into making the dream a reality.

The first scholarships were offered.

Some years later the Australian Catholic Bishops with the Australian Catholic University would take direct responsibility and management for the project and expand it. Hanar is a current recipient of an Australian Catholic University scholarship. Hanar's is from the Ursuline Sisters.

#### + SYMBOLS OF SOLIDARITY

Returning now to the visit in 2009.

The Queensland priest had taken to Iraq, symbols of solidarity from Australia and from *Ravina of Murri Ministry* in Brisbane Archdiocese.

Ravina has been with Murri Ministry since its founding in 1993.

She is with us today and offered the *Acknowledgement of Country* at the beginning of Mass. Thank you Ravina.

One of the symbols was a *message stick*, given to an Assyrian monastery in Alqosh.

The Assyrian people are the Indigenous people of that area.

Another symbol was a *wooden cross*, painted by an Aboriginal artist in Australia.

It was presented to a parish in Erbil, during Mass.

The two following video clips are of the presentation of the cross by the Queensland priest, and one of the Iraqi priests blessing the people at Mass while holding the cross.

[video clips are shown\*]

Some of the previous Iraqi scholarship recipients over the years have shared their stories with our parish community:

- *Sister Azhar* and *Sister Samar*, who lived during their studies with the Franciscan Sisters in Kedron Parish
- *Doctors Saveen* and *Ban*, who lived in Banyo/Nundah Parish and
- *Fr Denka*, who lived in Sydney with the Chaldean community

After completing their Master's degrees, they returned to Iraq to enable the dream to become a reality.

We welcome *Hanar* and invite her to speak.  
Hanar builds bridges through her faith and with her educational skills.  
Thank you Hanar.

May each of us grow in the love of God during this week.

Amen

[Hanar shares\*]

Fr Gerry

Readings: <https://universalis.com/Australia/20200607/mass.htm>

[YouTube video Holy Trinity Sunday Mass, 7 June 2020](#) – includes the video clips\*