



Homily - Multicultural Mass

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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As we gather here in the Cathedral this evening to celebrate the rich diversity of our Catholic community, and as we experience some of the traditions which enrich the prayer, spirituality and liturgy of the Church in the various cultures in which the Church seeks to proclaim the gospel, we can rejoice that for the last two thousand years the Church has been, and continues to be, faithful to the Lord's command to go and preach the gospel to all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. As the gospel has been brought to each new place and people over these many hundreds of years the experience and understanding of the real meaning of the gospel in all its beauty has been enriched.

These various cultures in which the gospel is proclaimed and in which it finds a home are a powerful sign of the rich creativity and fruitfulness of the Spirit of God. The many languages, traditions, musical styles, forms of dress, varieties of food and so on are an invitation to all of us to wonder at the mystery and variety of humanity created in the image of God and a challenge to us to recognise that there is more than one way to give expression to our deepest feelings and dreams, our deepest joys and sorrows. This richness and diversity of cultures makes itself known very powerfully in the variety of ways in which our Catholic faith and spirituality is expressed.

As we look around our world today, however, we must also recognise that this rich tapestry of cultures and traditions, while for us a sign of the mysterious greatness of God, is often a source of tension rather than of harmony, of violence rather than of peace, of hatred rather than of love. One of the important aspects of tonight's celebration is the witness it gives that in our Catholic community we want our diversity to be something we celebrate and acknowledge as a wonderful gift from God rather than something about which we should be nervous or afraid.

The fact that our culture and spirituality can sometimes be a source of division rather than of unity is a sign that, just like everything else really important in our lives, this cultural richness, this wonderful gift of God, can be distorted or damaged by sin. We are created in the image of God and this of course is our glory and the source of our human dignity, but through our sinfulness we have distorted and disfigured this image. We are meant to reflect the beauty and the love of God alive in our world. At times we reflect the very opposite.



If this is true of us as individuals, it is also true of us as communities. And if it is true of us as communities, it is also true of the cultures from which we come and to which we belong.

In the face of our own personal human sinfulness Jesus comes and says to each of us, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is close at hand”. This call to conversion is not just a call to individuals, but also to cultures. Even as we rejoice in our own unique cultural heritage, and as we rejoice in the cultural richness of Australia, which seeks to hold together in harmony so many cultures from all around the world, we must also have the courage to see that every culture, including the one which is most dear to us, must be set free from all that is opposed to the creative intention and loving design of God for his people and for his world. In the end, for us as Christians, every culture must be measured against the culture of the Gospel.

To speak of the culture of the gospel might seem strange, but as Christians our way of living, and our way of relating to each other, and our way of understanding God must ultimately be built not on our cultural inheritance but on the words and example of Jesus. When, in the story of the Good Samaritan for example, the Jewish priest and Levite walked by on the other side and refused to help the man lying wounded on the road and desperately in need of help, they probably did so not out of cruelty or hardness of heart but in fidelity to their traditions, their culture, which forbade religious figures to be contaminated by the blood of others. It was the stranger, the foreigner, who allowed himself to be moved by compassion for the suffering person and reach out to him with practical help. In this instance the gospel culture had to take precedence over the local culture. This is what the Good Samaritan did.

It was the same when Jesus encountered the woman caught in adultery. The culture of the time demanded that this woman be punished for her sin. But the gospel culture, living in the words and deeds of Jesus, had to take precedence – and this is why Jesus said to her, “I do not condemn you”.

Tonight’s gospel is another very clear expression of something that lies at the heart of the gospel culture. Hungers must be satisfied, thirst must be quenched, strangers must be welcomed, the naked must be clothed, prisoners must be visited – because in such people Jesus is waiting for us to reach out to him with the love and compassion he shows to us. Cultural practices and traditions, which can sometimes be built on exclusion rather than inclusion, on separation rather than on unity, on self-interest rather than on large-hearted generosity, must be let go of if they conflict with the culture of the gospel, the way of Jesus.

In our archdiocese we are over the next few months committing ourselves to the great task of forming ourselves, or better still to say, allowing the Spirit of God to form us, into a people who together walk in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd. He is the way and we follow him – and



when our cultural inheritance helps us to do this we embrace it with joy. Jesus is the Truth and we believe in him – and when our cultural inheritance help us to commit ourselves to this truth more fully we embrace it with gratitude. Jesus is our life, and when our cultural inheritance deepens our respect for life and our determination to be people who live our lives to the full, we embrace it with enthusiasm. But if we discover there are elements in our cultural inheritance or traditions which conflict with the way of Jesus we must have the courage to let them go. Before we are members of any particular culture, we are disciples of Jesus. This is the source of our deepest identity. It is also the source of our deepest joy and the promise of that peace which, in our own personal lives and in the lives of our society and our world, can only be given us by the Lord.