

Homily for people and parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 1st June 2025, Easter 7

Readings: **Acts 16:16-34**

Revelation 22:12-22

Psalm 97

John 17:20-26

We might be tempted to think that terrorism is a recent thing, and that before the Twin Towers were attacked in New York twenty-four years ago, the world was a peaceful place. However, this would deny the historical reality of terrorism in many places before 9/11.

When I was growing up in London the Irish Republican Army used car bombs in England and Northern Ireland to kill civilians. A pub in Guildford was bombed, a bandstand full of musicians was bombed, a train station was bombed... too many places were bombed. In those troubled years rubbish bins disappeared from London railway stations because they were easy places in which to leave a parcel bomb!

At school we heard about Catholics killing Protestants in retaliation for things that happened long ago, and we knew nothing about the complex history of politics in Ireland. We did not know anything about the imposed settlement of Northern Ireland by English Protestants, and the dispossession and oppression of Irish Catholics in that process. If we had known these things we may have had some appreciation for the legacy of resentment that resulted from this.

Since the Reformation in the 16th Century there are many examples of violence between Roman Catholic Christians and those who were not Catholic, which is ironic remembering the call from Jesus to love neighbour. The Second Vatican Council in the 1960's gave permission, for the first time, to have shared dialogue, shared worship, and shared ministry; and this was embraced and explored by many clergy and congregations.

This longing for better relationship between Catholics and non-Catholics also found expression in Queensland. In 1984 a Covenant was signed between the Anglican and Catholic Archdioceses of Brisbane. One thousand two hundred people were present for the occasion at St John's Cathedral during which Archbishop John Grindrod and Archbishop Francis Rush embraced one another. The longing for unity expressed in today's Gospel seemed to be one step closer... But, forty one years later I think there is less energy for Christian unity, particularly among young people, and I think there are at least three reasons for this:

- The first is that there are now well-established expressions of mutual respect and cooperation between Catholic and Anglican congregations and ministries, so in many ways the need to get together is less urgent! We understand that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and though technically we are not supposed to break bread

together... it does happen in many places and could be understood as an unauthorised blessing!

- The second is that though we recognise and celebrate the common ground of Christian faith there are now significant differences in understanding who we can ordain for leadership in the Church. In our Diocese we ordain both women and men - Deacons, Priests, and Bishops – and they may be single, or married. While current Catholic polity allows only celibate, single men to be ordained priest and bishop.
- And the last is that the conflict between our denominations no longer creates disharmony in our society... and that is a great thing!

It took courage for women and men to build bridges of trust across the sectarian barriers of Catholic and Anglican identity. For them to challenge the prejudice against those who were considered 'other' and 'less' and live from an understanding that was based on mutuality and shared humanity

In the reading from Acts today (Acts 16:16-34) we hear about Paul having courage enough to bring positive change in the life of another person. He did this by freeing a young woman who was being exploited, and in response those who had made a profit from her captivity made false accusations against him. Consequently, Paul was publicly stripped, beaten, and thrown into prison.

Reflecting on what happened to Paul there is a reminder that it can be costly to be involved in the liberation of others. No matter how good the intention, and no matter how inspired by God's Spirit, some people can misunderstand, misrepresent, and punish others for doing good.

Please imagine being with Paul and his friend Silas through that experience. Imagine how you would feel while being battered, bruised; chained up in a prison cell, and uncertain about what was going to happen the next day.

I think I would be feeling very sorry for myself, but the reading tells us that Paul and Silas were praying aloud and singing hymns to God. You don't get what the reading calls 'a severe flogging' without black-eyes, split lips, and deep tissue injury... but, they were praying and singing hymns to God!

Don't get me wrong – we understand that God did not leave them there. There was an earthquake, their chains fell off, and the jailer and his whole family came to faith. But, the jailer washed their wounds – he did not take the wounds away.

No matter how good the intention, and no matter how inspired by God's Spirit, it can be a costly thing to be involved in the liberation and care of another... and, it will always demand something of us.

So, what injustice, societal issue, or community need – moves you, and moves me - to some form of action? Is it domestic and family violence, the reality of homelessness in our community, or the 'epidemic of loneliness' that Australian social researchers have identified?

If you already know the answer to the question – may God bless, guide, and sustain you in the journey of responding compassionately to human need.. But, if you're not sure... I think it's worth taking into prayer.

Please join me as I close in prayer now...

Holy God, thank you for Jesus and for the way he brought hope and love to those considered least by the society of his time. Through your Spirit, help us to be hope bringers, and love givers in our time. We pray in the name of Christ. **Amen.**