



**Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)  
End of 2017 NAIDOC Week Mass**

**Homily**

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton  
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral  
Sunday, 9 July 2017

It is with the Mass this evening that NAIDOC Week comes to an end for the people of the Archdiocese of Perth.

St Mary's Cathedral is a very fitting place for us to gather and celebrate together. It is the mother church of our Archdiocese, and as such is the church where anyone can come and find a welcome. A way of illustrating this is with the convention that Catholics from any part of the Archdiocese may have their baptism or marriage celebrated in the Cathedral. A right is enshrined in this convention.

But there is another way in which the Cathedral is a fitting place for this Mass for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the Archdiocese.

Over the years, this, the mother church of the Archdiocese, has been the first home for the many newcomers to Perth who have come from so many different countries. They have come in search of a new start for their lives. Many have come because of war and persecution in their homeland. Others have come to our land because they have seen that there is no future for their children in their homeland where there is injustice, poverty and hopelessness because of systematic corruption, or political power has been taken away from the people by elitist groups of military leaders.

Every effort is made to make St Mary's Cathedral a place of welcome for everyone and the multicultural character of the congregations here bear out the fact that Catholics from many lands have made their spiritual home here. We hope that all communities will feel welcome here and that the communities of the first people of this land, above all, will feel this welcome too, and see this place as a spiritual home.

The theme of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday for 2017 was set from the Gospels and is 'Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me'. Its choice reminds us of Jesus' own words and his commandment of love and compassion. The love of God stirs us so that we may have open minds and hearts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and, indeed, to all who are marginalised including refugees, the disabled and impoverished.

Jesus spoke of real love as being a yoke and burden. A yoke is the harness that is placed over the shoulders of a horse or bullock, and the load that is to be drawn is attached to the yoke. For



the Christian, the yoke is our faith, our partnership with the Father and his Son Jesus. The burden is the commandment to love, to be compassionate, to seek to understand the others around us and to respond generously to them.

Jesus realised that when a person is invited to believe in God and takes this faith up seriously, there comes with it a sense of responsibility. For the Christian this responsibility is to allow the Holy Spirit to shape us to be like Jesus. As we submit to the Spirit in our hearts, we will notice that we begin to show the love and compassion of Jesus in our thoughts and actions. The Spirit has to be able to work on us so that a transformation can take place within us, that we may become oriented to the mind of the Father.

This, I believe, is the yoke and burden of the Christian Faith. It is a struggle to turn the focus from ourselves to see the others around us, and appreciate their struggles and needs. The yoke and burden, however, is rewarding because the more that we are transformed to be like Jesus, the happier and freer we become. In loving others, being able to put our interests and needs second for the sake of another, is the source of our true happiness.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters are seeking a new communion with all the people of our land of Australia. This is the time for reconciliation. We are challenged to come together as people of many nations, especially when under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, to be one people, and to acknowledge that we are brothers and sisters in Christ above all else.

Reconciliation requires that we accept the gift to listen to one another. The stories of each community need to be heard. The stories of the first people of this land are important and have to be shared for us to understand who they are and the history, especially, of the last two hundred years.

Bishop Saunders of the Broome Diocese recently reflected on Aboriginal family life. He has lived and worked with Aboriginal people for forty years, together with the priests, Religious and lay missionaries in the Kimberly. He traced the complex family arrangements for the care of the children that have been practiced for thousands of years. For example, there is a shared responsibility in the family for the care and upbringing of children. The mother's sister is also considered to be the child's mother too, and so with the father's brother, he is considered to be a father to the child. There is a collective responsibility felt by the family in raising the children. This is still being practiced in many communities across Australia.

Being able to observe Aboriginal family life today, the bishop wrote that despite "the devastating effects of colonisation, the dispossession of family country, and the accompanying social disconnection.....the bonds of family life persevered and survived these overwhelming tribulations". The sense of family remained strong.

The stories of the indigenous peoples of Australia will tell of the impact that attitudes, perceptions and government policies have had on them. We need to listen.

Bishop Saunders also wrote on the shared crisis that all the communities of Australia face, indigenous and non-indigenous alike. Among these is addiction to drugs, alcohol and chemical



substances. Our stories need to be heard and our insights shared for the good of all of our communities.

Reconciliation requires this listening and learning. Respect for one another will flow forth. Greater efforts to consult and collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by government and non-government agencies will be recognised, for families and communities to be strengthened, and for the destructive issues that are being faced to be solved.

Listening, learning together through our honest and respectful sharing, and committing to each other to build communion between us are possible with Jesus Christ. If we keep our gaze on him, we will see more clearly the living Lord in the ones we welcome and treat as our brothers and sisters. Let pray for this grace today and open ourselves to one another. Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me.