



**18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Sunday**

Homily

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday 4 August, 2019

I welcome you in a very special way, the many visitors who have come to the Cathedral this morning and particularly the people of the Aboriginal communities who live in the metropolitan area, and those I'm sure who have groups in the country areas, and we include all those members of the families in the celebration of the Mass today.

Over the last couple of months, I've been reading a book which talks about the knowledge that European Australians, and Australians from other countries as well, have begun to learn about the ancient Aboriginal peoples of this country.

It's called Deep Time Dreaming.

And through the work of archaeologists, mostly from the 1920's and 30's, up until today, some very important questions have been answered about the life and even the history of the Aboriginal people across this country.

One of the questions that archaeologists have been trying to work out is, how long have aboriginal people lived in this land?

Initially, they thought that Aboriginal people had lived in Australia for 20,000 years... but with more and more work and discoveries that are made, they have been able to get to a point where we can say that Aboriginal people have been here for nearly 60,000 years!

To have a mental image of what 60, 000 years looks like is almost impossible, which is why the author of this book used the words 'Deep Time.'

A time span that we find almost impossible to understand and to conceptualise in our thinking.

As you know, the Aboriginal people have been able to communicate their history, their law, their values, verbally, by passing down generation to generation, by word of mouth, by stories, these traditions, this law.

And that in itself is an extraordinary thing, a remarkable thing.

Because we're used to working with documents, letters and writings of people in order to piece together the truth about history.



These teams, these successive teams of archaeologists across the years have, by using better methods, have been able to discover the living history of certain groups, of certain families within Australian Aboriginal communities.

And this has been very important work that they contribute to our knowledge.

We are a multi-cultural country; we are a multi-cultural church. And as I mentioned earlier, Pope John Paul II when he met with the Aboriginal people, when he came to Australia in 1986, when he met them in Alice Springs, he reminded the Australian Church at large that we need to allow the Aboriginal people to make their contribution to the Church; to the life of the Church; to the mission of the Church; to the Church's understanding of itself.

This I think, has been taken up very seriously by the Catholic Church.

Today, by having so many people here who have Aboriginal ancestry; who are Aboriginal themselves; who identify as Aboriginal people: this I think is an important thing for us to acknowledge.

Because they are people who belong in the Church and who have their place in the Church.

They are people like ourselves who have our aspirations, and at the same time realise the human limitations we have in achieving these aspirations.

That I think, is what the Word of God is allowing us to reflect upon today as we celebrate this Mass, when it talks about vanity.

Vanity is not just about spending a lot of time on our appearance, vanity is also not recognising that there is always a gap between our aspirations and what we actually achieve.

And I guess there's no clearer example of that than a young, aspiring politician who has tremendous aspirations. Once elected, gets into parliament and discovers that there all these pressures around that person that in some way make it difficult for those aspirations to be delivered.

This isn't to say that it's about morality or about human sinfulness, this is the human condition, this is what we struggle with in our lives: we will always have these very high aspirations, these very high goals in our life and yet, at the same time we understand through our experience that these goals and aspirations sometimes are not achieved, or sometimes take a long, long time to achieve.

The vanity in this is not recognising that there always is the gap and that may lead us to think that the gap can only be closed by our efforts.

Where does Jesus Christ come into this? Where does the faith that holds us together today help us to understand a way through this very difficult problem for all of the people of the world.

The way that Jesus shows is the way of embracing our limitations, embracing the uncertainties and even embracing the failures that come our way in achieving our aspirations.



It is significant then that we are able to say to Jesus Christ, “Come into our lives, come into these situations, come into these problems and these issues that we want to solve in our society.”

“Because it’s only with you that we are able to achieve that, in a sense, narrowing of the gap between our aspirations and what we achieve.”

With his strength and with his example of the way of living the Gospel: embodying those virtues of humility; recognising the limits that we have ourselves; a Gospel that teaches us the need for patience; a Gospel that teaches us the need for compassion.

Which, in another way, is saying that we need to be people who are prepared to stand in the shoes of the other, to understand them.

These are the ways that Jesus asks us to approach the great questions in our society, and particularly the question of the embracing of the Aboriginal people within our community.

Allowing them to make their contribution to the life of this nation.

Of drawing upon the wisdom of their way of life and their values that have enabled them to live in this country for such a long time.

They know this land; they know the difficulties that there are trying to live in this land.

They know what is needed in order to live together in families and tribal groups.

They understood the laws that were required in order to bring about harmony and peace.

There is so much that we can learn; there is so much that we can draw upon from their wisdom.

So today, as we celebrate the Eucharist, we come to Jesus Christ and we ask him for that humility, that compassion, that desire to learn and to journey together with all the members of our community, but very importantly with the members of our Aboriginal Catholic Community here in Australia.

Soon we will stand and confess our creed - and this is the thing that binds us together: the baptismal creed; belief in God the Father; belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God; belief in the Holy Spirit.

We pray that as Jesus has come, not just to the Aboriginal people but to the peoples of all the world, he has come in order to bring us the truth about God, above all to show us the love of God – we pray that in this profession of faith we will be united with this moment and that we will seek with the power of the Spirit to bring about unity and peace in our land.