



**30th 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
Sunday 25 October, 2020

This is a national day of celebration and praying and pledging ourselves, all of us, to the path of reconciliation in this land. So it is that we have members of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and members of, I think it is Clontarf Aboriginal College, and students from other schools as well, who are helping us in celebration and in that way, giving us a sign of their faith.

There is not one person in this Cathedral whose family has not come to this land from another country. Even the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have themselves been migrants and come to this land, even though many thousands and thousands of years before most of us.

We honour indigenous celebration this particular day, this Sunday, the way in which that almost intuition I call it, the intuition that people from all different lands that have come to Australia have had about God, about his existence and about his something in our lives, has meant that we, in many ways, are brothers and sisters in faith.

St Paul was one of the great missionaries and he has given us in the second reading, a description about how the faith in Jesus Christ gradually started to spread throughout the world he knew. Many, many people who were looking for God in their lives found the answer to that journey hearing the Word of God preached to them, the Word of God that Jesus gave himself as the Lamb of God. And so these are notes simply as it were of the beginnings of the faith gradually moving through the world.

This same faith was brought to Australia and it was preached, and it was in that way of course, through the work of those missionaries, that so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in fact believe as we believe, they believe in Jesus Christ and they have experienced in their lives, like we have, that presence of Christ and that strength of God, that because of his saving Son, God is our Strength.

I sense this is a moment for us to celebrate and to recognise one another as brothers and sisters. When Jesus is asked that question, 'What is the greatest Commandment?' His response was to remind those who questioned him of something that they would say day by day and in particular



week by week when they gathered in their synagogues. And it is the great prayer known as the Shema.

Shema Israel, listen Israel. The Lord is one, the Lord is God.

It is this Lord who we know, that accompanies us in our lives, who becomes our strength. If you have ever been fortunate enough meet a Jewish family and be invited to their home, one of the things that you will notice is when you enter into the house, is that by the front door there is a little cylinder that has been placed in the wall. The Jewish family, upon entering the house, will touch this cylinder. And as they leave the house they will touch the cylinder to remind themselves that whatever they do during the day, they are doing it in response to their faith, they are doing it to glorify God, they are doing it knowing that God is the center of their lives and they are his servants.

This is the answer that Jesus gave to those Jews who came to him, asking him, 'what is the greatest commandment?' Love God. To put God in the center of our lives. And he added to that the commandment that he was referring to in another part of the scriptures, 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.'

Why did Jesus bring these two commandments together as one?

I think, if you go back to the story of God creating the universe, creating our world – he created the creatures that are part this world with us, and of course he created humanity. And this is where we find a marvelous thing, that among all the things he had created, God created man and woman in his own image. To say that God creates us in an intimate likeness of himself – there is no creature that is more like him than ourselves.

And so it is that we need to realise that if each of us is created in the image of God, then we truly are brothers and sister of one another. We are, each of us, deserving of respect because of that Spirit that we carry, because of that likeness that we have to him.

And I think what we can take from this gospel today, is that whenever we begin to learn how to love God, we begin, as Jesus suggests, by learning to love ourselves. By coming to understand that we are as was said, we are creatures of God, we are made in his image and we are loved by God, each and every one of us. Knowing who we are and what we are.

And from that we can move out, to see the others in our lives around us. And it is possible for us to recognise that they might have the same relationship with their creator God, they love in the exact same way, they show mercy in the same way that I show mercy to my own.

This is how I am able to accept others into my life; I am no longer the center of the universe – there are others. This is probably one of the greatest lessons that we learn as we grow from babies to children, that we share this world with others, we share this life with others. And



therefore we recognize that our brothers and sisters, like us, are made in the image of God and that we are all created equal. Today we have a theme around our gathering which is 'Together in Spirit', and so our celebration of the Mass today is in recognition of our brothers and sisters who have gone far, who have gone far with Christ. Who today have faith because of the work of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit has done. The Holy Spirit brings us into the Church, brings us into this communion. The Holy Spirit enables us be brothers and sisters, acknowledging and recognizing one another.

And so, today we pray as we continue to walk in this faith, this faith that belongs to us, this faith that has certainly been there for each and every one of us, we pray that the Holy Spirit will help us to recognize one another as brothers and sisters and will enable us then to be people who will attract others to this Christian faith because of the way in which we love.

I thank all those who have come here today on this special date and ask the Lord a special blessing on them and their families. We pray that our faith, our home and our love would be strengthened.