



Abraham Day

Speech

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
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**Drill Hall, The University of Notre Dame, Fremantle
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It is a privilege to be able to join you as we celebrate the father of faith in the one God, Abraham, and I, too, welcome Rabbi Daniel Lieberman and Sheikh Muhammad Agherdien.

Judaism, Islam and Christianity each recognise the importance of Abraham and in our own ways, we seek to learn from his story, the road to faith and trust in God.

The life and experiences of Abraham teach us that the road to faith, so to speak, is a journey that can have many twists and turns, and will be mysterious. There is the need for each of us on this journey through life to learn the art of discernment, to hear the Spirit of God speaking in the events of life and to listen deeply to what is being said in those experiences and events.

Abraham was a man without land of his own and without a son. These two facts were the source of his unhappiness and feelings of inadequacy. He was unable to be fulfilled. God, though, was to provide him a son, and so Abraham learnt that he could lean on God, rather than on his own resources alone.

We are to focus today on the topic: Hope in Unsettling Times. For my part, I thought I would draw on the little book that records some conversations with Pope Francis last year in the midst of COVID-19. The book is titled, "Let us Dream: The path to a Better Future".

I have selected only a few points for today.

The reasons for our unsettled times are more than COVID, but the pandemic has helped us to understand many of the other reasons.

Pope Francis believes that when we experience absolute vulnerability one outcome can be that we may be opened to moments of grace and revelation.

There is a sense that catastrophes can be "threshold moments", which divide one era from another. Pope Francis states that COVID has afforded us with the moment "to dream big" and



rethink our priorities- what we value, want and seek, and for us to commit to act in our daily lives on what we have dreamed.

COVID has exposed the lie that we are self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency can lead us to accept inequalities among people, and weakens the bonds for families and communities.

There was a wakeup call in the witness by doctors and nurses, who on the frontline, risked their lives. Some lost their lives with the others who also worked to keep services going.

“They are the saints next door, who have awoken something important in our hearts. They remind us that our lives are a gift and we grow by giving ourselves, not by preserving ourselves. What a sign of contradiction to the individualism and self-obsession, and lack of solidarity that dominate our wealthier societies”.

This has been a learning for the path to a better future.

Because of the pandemic, we have reviewed the importance of fraternity and recognised how it has revealed something about the human condition. Francis hopes that this re-evaluation of fraternity, household by household, community by community, nation by nation may become a pathway to a renewed care for the common good.

He speaks of a new empathy coming to birth within us when we come through to the other side of the pandemic. Can we allow ourselves to be touched by others' pain?

A commentator recently reflected that personal crises and community crises “dethrone the sovereign self” and begin a process of purification and clarification. Pope Francis expresses this in his own way: “Sometimes an uprooting can be a healing or a radical makeover”.

Pope Francis discerns that as we are hardwired to belong to community, we naturally seek to be with and collaborate with others. No one is saved alone. This fundamental characteristic of humanity will mean that we work for a new politics of inclusion, which will counter excessive individualism and the aggressive populism of recent times that loves to identify and hunt out enemies at home and abroad.

The path to a better future needs to embrace fraternity, for this is “the new frontier and is a principle that can knit together the competing demands of liberty and equality”. The people are sensing and beginning to call for a communitarian reset of liberal values and our institutions.

“Without the ‘We’ of a people, of a family, of institutions, of society that transcends the ‘I’ of individual interests, we are left with a battle for supremacy between factions and interests”.

“We cannot let the current clarifying moment pass us by”.