

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday 2011 Liturgy Information Booklet



Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

National Office for Liturgy

10 May 2011

The observance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday once again provides the opportunity for the Catholic community in Australia to reflect on the needs and aspirations of the indigenous peoples of this land. All Catholics will be aware the current plight of many indigenous people, particularly (but not exclusively) in remote locations in Western Australian and the Northern Territory.

Finding solutions to these problems and responding appropriately is not easy and requires good will and the capacity to listen before acting. As Catholic Christians we have a long tradition of spending time in prayer and meditation waiting in the silence for God to speak.

Perhaps in the liturgy on this day, there might be a greater provision for silence. The liturgy already provides for silence at several points in the rite, but perhaps these silences might be the opportunity for both indigenous and non-indigenous worshippers to sharpen our focus:

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. (Psalm 27:14)

Fr Peter G. Williams
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Archbishop Mark Coleridge (Chairman)
Archbishop Denis Hart
Bishop Max Davis
Bishop Peter Ingham



Peter Smith

Peter is a Kamilaroi man, Kamilaroi country is around south west Queensland north west NSW. Peter was born in Murrurundi in the Upper Hunter Valley of NSW and moved to Queensland in 1960. Peter served 23 years in the Australian Regular Army with active service in Malaysia in 1956/57 and in Vietnam in 1966/67 he is married with 9 children, 5 girls and 4 boys. Peter has 25 grandchildren and 7 great grand children. Peter was member of NATSICC for 9 years from its formation, the last 3 years as the chairperson. He is a member of the Mt Isa Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council. For the past 4 years he has been the 'World Council of Churches Australian' representative at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.



Thelma Parker

Thelma is an aboriginal woman from the Wulluwurru Wakamunna and Kalkadoon tribes born in Cloncurry and lived the majority of her earlier life in western Queensland.

Being raised in a remote and isolated area and from an extended family situation provided her with the knowledge and skills of her family's traditional aboriginal culture. In the last twenty years she has lived and worked in the urban Centres of Darwin, Cairns and Townsville where she held leadership positions in Indigenous education.

Thelma is currently the principal of a school in Mt. Isa.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday has been celebrated in Australia for nearly 20 years. It has been placed in the official Church 'Calendar' the ordo, and falls annually on the first Sunday in July.

The Catholic Community in Australia is a patchwork of experiences, lifestyles, nationalities and backgrounds that are drawn together by one common thread, our belief and faith in God. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday is an opportunity for Indigenous and non Indigenous people to sit side by side to celebrate the gifts that indigenous people bring to the Church in Australia.

From Sydney's CBD to Western Australia's Broome, Indigenous Catholics are contributing to the work of the church and sharing the gospel. There are many ways that the Liturgy can be Inculturated in order to make people feel at home in the presence of Jesus.

NATSICC prepares Liturgy Resources to assist parishes and schools in celebrating the day in a way that is culturally appropriate and Liturgically correct. The resources include options for congregations that have:

- no Indigenous people
- only Indigenous people
- a mixture of Indigenous and non Indigenous people

The way Mass is celebrated on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday in an Urban setting differs from the way it is celebrated in an urban Parish.

If God is truly always present everywhere we should expect God's presence and something of God's nature to be revealed in all of creation. We should expect and take seriously that God's presence and God's spirit has been at work in all people in all places at all times in a multitude of differing cultures, thought patterns and world views. God's presence and insight into the nature of God will surface differently within the human factors.

If we imagine God as all pervasive, in all thought all that exists, we must believe in God's spirit actively working in all cultures, all places at all times within greatly divergent thought patterns and Worldviews.

Tomorrows Catholics, Michael Morwood, Chapter 4, page 47

Peter Smith shares the way in which Members of the Mount Isa branch of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council (AICC) 'go bush' once every month for their "Bush Prayers". These are held in a dry creek bed within a short drive of Mount Isa. The prayer leader changes each month.

The members sit on the sand in the creek bed, or on fallen dead tree trunks under the shade of a large tree. Some days there is a gentle breeze blowing, as we listen to the birds in the trees along the bank, or in moments of quietness one can hear the rustle of a lizard in the dry undergrowth. There is life even in this part of God's creation, these quiet, dry places. On other days there is no breeze, no birds singing, just stillness. These days have their own form of beauty, as we sit in silence, and listen to God speak to us individually. Silence in this setting is very rewarding.

The format of the prayers may vary a little from time to time, but generally, we follow a traditional liturgical pattern: We gather; We listen; We respond and We send forth. We commence our prayers with a welcome by the prayer leader, usually one of the AICC Elders who had been commissioned by Bishop Ray Benjamin, when he was Bishop of the Townsville Diocese, to perform baptisms and funerals and to work in the Aboriginal community. Our present Bishop, Michael Putney has, this year commissioned another Church Elder, clearly expressing his support for our continued ministry.

This is followed by a song then a prayer. The welcoming prayer is written by the person who has prepared the liturgy for the day, and may indicate a concern that the member has at that time. Many Aboriginal people feel deep hurt and express that hurt in different ways. Following is a reflection, indicating some deep hurt within the person who prepared it.

There are many Aboriginal people who are hurting deep down inside their being. These bush prayers help us to come to grips with, and to express any hurt we may be feeling.

This is followed by the gospel read aloud. We listen and then discuss what the reading has had to say to us personally, sharing our thoughts and listening to others, which helps to broaden our understanding of the message from the reading. Some members may wish to bring to our attention some matter which is causing them concern. We don't always have the answer to their problem, but we are able to listen. There are times when we can do nothing but to give them a hug and let them know that we care.

At this time we may introduce some cultural aspect to the service in a ritual and have either a smoking ceremony, didgeridoo playing or a ceremony involving water; something which is relevant to the day's prayer. We often had an old man with very strong traditional beliefs playing the didgeridoo and telling stories. Since his death, we use a tape of his music and listening to him; we can feel his spirit's presence with us in the dry creek bed, which he loved so much. He was a man who integrated his strong traditional beliefs with his strong Christian beliefs expressed through dance, music, singing all coming together as one, making his worship complete for him. We can feel his presence, and God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit present in our worship. It is Aboriginal and it is Christian; it is from the heart, as we acknowledge God's love for us and we express, in our way, our love for God.

After the prayer service is finished, we go forth to share, we put the billy on and share a cup of tea and, asking God's blessing on what we are about to eat, break the damper and share some precious moments together. These days help to give us the strength to continue our struggle to take our rightful place and develop our leadership within the church.

God's Spirit is present in a cathedral, in a small parish church and God's Spirit is present in a dry creek bed near Mt Isa.

A pilgrim is a person who undertakes a journey to a sacred place.

The people of this land have been on a journey for a very long time, because that which was sacred to us had been called rubbish, stupid, pagan, or other words that undermined the importance of our beliefs.

That damage has had a terrible effect on us.

We are beginning our journey to again find that sacred place that our spirit longs for, and in doing so we are also getting in touch with our own spirituality.

We are Pilgrim People, on our journey to find our true sacred home.

Colleen Muckan

Our Dreaming: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Yesterday

Prior to the missionaries bringing us the knowledge of Christ and thus introducing us to Christianity we had a belief in a Spirit Creator. The most powerful thing that the early missionaries brought to us was the message of Jesus through the gospel. The manner in which it was brought to us was damaging to our culture, our spiritual beliefs and our lives because of own stories were dismissed. For example:

An example is the way some of our stories were treated. For instance the story of the brolga, the jabiru and the emu, as related by aboriginal Lutheran minister Pastor George Rosendale, tells the Jesus story.

The brolga and jabiru were sisters. The emu was their cousin. On one occasion the emu decided to visit his cousins.

When he came over the hill he could see what appeared to be a dust storm on the salt flats in the distance. He thought it must have been a whirlwind however, when he got closer he noticed that the brolga and jabiru were fighting one another.

He rushed down and got in between them to stop them from fighting. The emu was hit on the back with one of the nulla nulla wielded by the two sisters. The emu's blood was spilt on the head of the brolga and onto the legs of the jabiru. To this day the brolga has a red head and the jabiru has red legs and the emu has a lump on his back.

When the missionaries told our elders the story of Jesus who came as a peace maker and who shed his blood to bring peace to all peoples, our Elders said, "We already have that story". It was the story of the brolga, jabiru and emu.

Unfortunately those early missionaries told our people to forget those old stories. If only they had listened with open hearts and minds to what our elders had to offer they may have seen Jesus the peace maker in this story. Our people could then have much more easily related to the Gospel stories.

Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life and this life brought light to mankind.

John chapter 1:1 - 4

So do not be afraid of people. Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward.

Matthew Chapter 10:26; 40-41
(Jesus was speaking to his disciples)

Today

Today we acknowledge that the Indigenous perspective is included, acknowledged and integral in many areas of liturgy. This parallels what is happening in other areas. We should acknowledge the positive contribution that the Catholic Church has made towards the establishment of Community Indigenous Organisations such as health, legal services and housing. These organisations have now taken on their own identity being controlled by local Indigenous community members.

Presently NATSICC is the only National structure dealing exclusively with Indigenous issues within the church.

Many efforts have been made to bridge the gap between the largely Western European culture of the Catholic Church in Australia and the cultures of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These efforts or ministries had their beginnings in various ways, such as the appointment of Father Eugene Stockton as a chaplain to Aboriginal people in Sydney, and the work of Father Ted Kennedy and Mrs Shirley Smith ('Mum Shirl') over many years among the Aboriginal people at the Redfern parish in Sydney. During the 20 years after Pope John Paul II's speech, Aboriginal Catholic ministries or councils in many dioceses throughout Australia have been established, becoming a significant force in this dialogue of cultures.

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Inspired by John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council was established January 1989. In 1992 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference officially recognised and welcomed it as the national representative and consultative body to the church on issues concerning Indigenous Catholics. The road has not always been a smooth one, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now have a recognised place at the discussion table. The vision of NATSICC, inspired by the words of Pope John Paul II, is that it

Promotes and celebrates the cultural identity of our peoples across the nation by living and expressing in all its endeavours the spirituality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic peoples. Through this expression and recognition of our cultural identity we will find our rightful place within the Catholic Church in Australia.

*Social Justice Sunday Statement:
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, p 7-8*

Quote from Pope John Paul II (1986): 'You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others'

We are where we are today because of decisions made in the past (yesterday) in the future we will be where we are then because of decisions we make today. We must get it right.

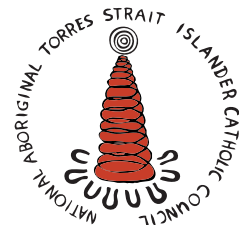
In liturgical celebration today in main stream churches a start has been made to include the Indigenous perspective:

- Acknowledgement of traditional owners
- Reconciliation smoking ceremony
- Traditional dancers in the gospel

and tomorrow... starts with us walking side by side together to ensure that Indigenous Catholics take their rightful place in the life of the Church in Australia!



Artwork by
Melissa Brickell (2011)



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

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