

NCCA REFLECTION FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

Our Ash Wednesday 2020 is amidst much greater awareness of climate change.

How might this influence our Ash Wednesday prayers and our Lenten Discipline?

Here are some suggestions, based around a reworking of this ancient blessing prayer:

“May we have nothing left to confess.

“No enemies, friends everywhere.

“No unhealthy attachments.

“May we, as Alcuin once prayed, ‘have none come to us and go away sad’.

“May the hates and fears of the world dissolve, God’s peace descending”.

Each Lent we have an opportunity to renew our faith, placing our lives again before God.

As disciples, we renew our quest to be true to Jesus, true to ourselves and each other.

“May we have nothing left to confess”

What might this require us to acknowledge and confess?

* Have we treated Creation as a resource to be used for whatever pleases us rather than as God’s good gift for us to care for?

* Have we been too greedy and taken too much for ourselves without consideration of the country, the animals and birds, the needs of future generations?

* Have we learned well from our First Nation peoples who were so gentle on this land for some 60,000 previous years?

* Have we preferred living with pleasant illusion rather than heed the clear warnings of our scientists? Like the 2018 Report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which makes it clear that over the next decade we must cut all global greenhouse gas emissions in half; that we must reach net zero emissions by 2050 to keep global warming to 1.5degrees C.

*Have our collective human actions, which are causing climate change, manifested a broken relationship with our Creator? If so, what now?

“No enemies, friends everywhere, ’none coming to us and going away sad”

In the friendship of God, incarnate in Jesus, what can we do to repair and deepen friendships?

Here are some matters for our deeper consideration:

* As the rise in global temperatures impacts sea levels, our Pacific neighbours face the trauma of displacement and relocation; the anguish of ‘leaving ancestors behind’ as traditional lands become uninhabitable. They convey their monthly anxiety at the time of a full and new moon’s impact on tides; their dread of more frequent and more violent cyclones. They see our persistence with coal; the image of our Prime Minister in the Parliament and note that what we seem to offer them, in this context, is “a visa to come and pick your fruit”.

* What too of our silenced birds, bees and trees, koalas and kangaroos, waratahs and wallabies, creatures and coral of the sea, all endangered species who depend on our being more friendly?

* What of our fragmented nation, impacted by a harsh discourse and by the unhelpful stereotypes of the ‘climate activist versus the climate-deniers’, none of it with much of friendship’s understanding.

How can we help our nation find a way to deal more graciously with this and other complex matters?

* Internationally, can the Paris Agreement become substantial this year? Can we hold the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees above pre industrial levels, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide and methane?

The framework for achieving this is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which has an annual Conference of the Parties (UNCOP).

This year’s UNCOP 26 in November must receive scaled-up Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), if the Paris Agreement is to succeed.

These are contributions which, in the familiar theological principle of ‘subsidiarity’, nations volunteer freely for the common good of all.

It is a consensus model (which is the only one which is politically feasible). It is based on mutually trusting that each nation will do their best, not what is the least they can get away with. No ‘guilding of the lily’, for example, with a tricky use of historic carbon credits.

As a developed nation and as a matter of our dignity and integrity in the family of nations, Australians must encourage a more generous and more substantial NDC is presented to the UNCOP 26, 8 November in Glasgow this year by our Government.

This is a matter of contemporary and inter-generational friendship.

The fact is, natural ways of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere are only reducing 1percent of what we are putting in (which is 1000 tonnes per second).

Yet too, natural ways are the only proven ways. So called 'geo -engineering solutions' are decades away from implementation, even if they work.

We simply must reduce emissions as soon as possible. We must do the maximum we can.

"No unhealthy attachments"

What does a deeper participation in a dynamic movement towards our human family being a more benign presence on the planet require of us personally?.

Recognising that every reduction in emissions is helpful, this Lent can we consider, the following for example:

- * A more plant-based diet;
- * Ramping up our use of renewables;
- * Capping our flying;
- * Exploring more non-carbon based modes of transport like electric cars;
- * Changing our consumption habits;
- * Attending to our buildings, including matters of heating and cooling, water storage.
- * Informing our advocacy by studying together books like Professor Ross Garnaut's '*Super-Power*' on Australia's potential to transition and be an economic superpower of the future post - carbon world.

Conclusion

When we reach Holy Week and Easter, after our Lenten journey, what is so vivid is Jesus' intentionality every step of the way.

As a peace-bearer Jesus chooses to ride gently into Jerusalem, remembered on Palm Sunday.

He holds the Last Supper with his friends and inaugurates the sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus washes the disciples' feet and thus conveys our life of servant leadership, in humble love.

Thereafter, Jesus endures the cruelty that leads to the Cross. He stands in dignified silence before the cruel and the absurd.

On the Cross Jesus continues to remember those who love him, those in need beside Him.

After His Resurrection, His first gift is Peace. (John 20:19)

So it continues.

What is vivid in Jesus' intentionality is how He seeks our co-operation.

We are to serve humanity in humble and generous love, praying for God's gift of the 'peace which passes all understanding' as we seek to be peace-makers in our day.

What is clear is that peace-making today definitely includes preventing further climate change.

Peace-making involves intentionally reducing greenhouse gas emissions so we have a safer climate for all God's creation, now and future.

Hence this 2020 Ash Wednesday reflection, which we hope is helpful.

"May the hates and the fears of the world dissolve, God's peace descending".

Bishop Philip Huggins

NCCA President