

No more *us* and *them*



The Bishop Speaks

As I write we are approaching Anzac day; as you read we have just celebrated it. We all know that Anzac Day does not glorify war; it abhors and laments war. It is the day of the year more than any other in Australia that prompts us to remember all those who have died or who are suffering because of war and to pray for them. This is a good thing.

Anzac Day is also the day more than any other in our nation which prompts us to pray for peace and to work for peace. This too is a good thing. And because adversity so often brings out the best in people, Anzac Day is probably also the day more

than any other in Australia which prompts us to reflect on and be grateful for those positive qualities and characteristics which mark us as a nation. This too is a good thing.

One of the options for Scripture Readings at Anzac Day Mass prompts us to recall just one of these Australian qualities: the ability to be able to make friends with former enemies. We read in Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "He (Jesus) is the peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart. ... He united them both in a single body and



reconciled them with God.” (Ephesians 2:14)

It is so easy to fall into the *us and them* mentality. It seems many of Jesus’ contemporaries thought “There are *us* the Jews and there are *them*, everybody else, the Gentiles”. Sadly, it is still a way of thinking all too common around the globe. This *us and them* mentality starts wars and keeps hostilities alive. The only way we will ever be finished with war is when we all see that as God’s children there is only *us* and no *them*.

Thank God Australia seems to recover quite well from the *us and them* mentality after a war. I observe that as a rule Australia as a nation enjoys good relationships with those nations we have faced across the battlefields of war.

Individual Australians also enjoy good relationships with citizens from nations who for brief periods of time have been called our “enemies”. We Australians in general do not hold a grudge. A number of these citizens from former so-called “enemy” countries even choose to live here and become Australian citizens.

In fact, I read recently a bold claim that “Australia is the most successful immigrant nation on earth.” The claim was largely based on the fact that of the 90 sovereign nations on the planet with a critical mass of 10 million or more residents, Australia has the second highest proportion of residents born abroad: a massive 28 percent! (The third was Canada with 22 percent. The highest was Saudi Arabia with 32 percent, but their foreign born residents are classified as guest workers who do not enjoy the full rights of citizenship as in Australia.)

It is true that there are some ethnicity-based tensions in Australia, there always have been, and there probably always will. But our immigration story is a great success and it is not only to the credit of the current generation.

It has been built up layer upon layer over two hundred years. We are a people that in every

generation welcomes new-comers fleeing from calamity and drawn by our freedom and prosperity. In every generation we have been open to those aspects of newly arrived cultures which accord with and sometimes improve our existing culture and our deeply held national values and convictions. And we are rightly resistant to those elements that don’t.

Whilst there may be the odd hic-up along the way, when it comes to putting wars behind us or welcoming newcomers to our shores Australia has a good report card at overcoming the *us and them* mentality and becoming simply *us*!

It is not just our own efforts that achieve this; it is our nature as a Christian nation that has contributed

most to this success for it is in Jesus Christ that the two become one! May we always be a nation willing and ready to welcome and be reconciled with others! As we sing in our National Anthem, “with courage let us all combine to advance Australia Fair.”

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Most Reverend Michael Kennedy

Bishop of Armidale

