

Homily. 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 2/3 July 2022.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday.

I was at school from the mid 60's through the mid 70's. For many of those years my best friend was Ian. He lived at Hervey Bay and commuted daily by bus to Maryborough for school. Ian and his family came from the Torres Strait with other family connections to Fraser Island, now called K'gari, the Butchulla peoples land and heritage. At that time it never entered my mind that Ian was in any way different from me. We were simply friends in the same class who spent our lunch breaks together talking about kids stuff that mattered to us back then.

I forget when it was, but at some point there was a 3 day class excursion to K'gari for a School camp. This wasn't as simple an exercise as it is today. One day, on the Island's ocean side, Ian and I were sitting on a high dune talking and digging in the sand. We unearthed a Midden of shells and a few other objects. I didn't really know what we had come across, just a heap of old shells I thought. It was Ian who told me what this was; an old feasting place for the ancestors, a place where they had gathered long ago to enjoy the fruits of the Sea, share their stories and talk about their ways. This was the first time that it dawned on me that Ian had a much different heritage and story to my own.

Ian couldn't have been the only indigenous person at our school, but I knew of no other. I say this because I now know that Maryborough and Hervey Bay had and still has many first peoples and that Maryborough has a history as a major port of entry for Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders. Such was the ignorance of my youth!

Thankfully, today, all of us know more and know better. We know that First Nations people lived in this land for around 60,000 years before Europeans and other peoples and cultures ever set foot on this continent. We understand that these First peoples were dispossessed of their land, home, culture, families and tribal bonds, unjustly and too often violently. We're now beginning to grasp that we have a lot to learn from Australia's indigenous peoples, ancient knowledge and wisdom that could help all of us navigate and survive in our present challenging and changing times.

If we're going to do this we've got to Get Up, Stand Up and Show up, the theme of this Sunday. We've got to find our common ground and ways, labouring together to reconcile our broken past, recompense wrongs done and so reap in a harvest of mutual respect, dignity and appreciation. This is the only way that we can help fulfil Isaiah's prophecy of comfort, gladness, joy and flourishing for all who make Australia home. In this ongoing work Jesus teaches us that we need deep trust in God, in each other as companions on the journey and out working in the field, along with much honesty and humility. These are the qualities we need to keep our conversation on track and stay true to our calling.

None of this is easy of course, yet I often think to myself how good it would be for us to regain something of the ease that Ian and I had all those years ago. It'd be like the comfortable friendship of two boys digging in the sand, companions sharing time together, discovering and learning on K'gari, a name which means 'Paradise' and which Jesus called the Kingdom of God very near to you.