

Our World is in turmoil as we confront the horrors of war between Hamas and Israel, the earthquakes in Afghanistan, continuing war in the Ukraine, the sacking of the speaker in the Congress in the USA and many other events that are happening in our world. On the positive side of the ledger, we have the Synod on Synodality happening in Rome which is promoting a new way of being church by listening, discerning, and walking together which is called the synodal way. What I am hearing at present is that it is a prayerful gathering focussed on listening and learning. It could be a lesson for the rest of our world which seems to be engaged in conflict rather than dialogue.

Yesterday, Australians went to the Referendum on the Voice and the outcome of this referendum will have a significant impact on our nation. We may have voted postal, pre-poll or yesterday but this morning we awoke to the news that the nation voted a resounding no in all states except the ACT. It is not easy to know what this means, but we might use today's readings to reflect on the future of our nation.

The reading from Isaiah addresses the Hebrews who have been enslaved in Babylon. Their land has been taken, their spiritual tradition mocked and forbidden, their families broken up and their culture obliterated. By the quiet waters they hear the Lord speaking to them to revive their drooping spirits and bring both the exiles and their captor's home by preparing a feast to welcome all nations.

In the wake of the referendum, what message do we bring to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? What is our message of hope so we may one day rejoice in the legacy of our first peoples who have occupied this land for more than 60,000 years? Can we come to the table as a multicultural nation recognising the dignity of all and rejoice as one nation in the blessings we receive from indigenous, migrant, and all citizens?

The psalm in response to the first reading speaks to a people in great need, weary, walking in darkness, a long way from home, depressed in spirit, confronted by enemies, and seeking comfort, healing, refreshment, and a home where they are safe from harm. We are all aware that white colonisation has not been a good experience for many of our first peoples: Expropriation of property in the declaration of terra nullius, the introduction of European diseases and the devastation of communities by alcohol and settler homicides.

Paul, in the letter to the Philippians thanks the community who have stood in solidarity with Paul in the good and difficult times, and he reminds us that God

stands with us in solidarity. So, in the aftermath of the referendum, how do we stand in solidarity with our first peoples and how do we continue to work for reconciliation in the wake of the expected negative outcome of the referendum?

When we look into the eyes of our first peoples how do we support them in their quest for recognition and a voice in our multicultural community?

Our Gospel is the story of invitations to a wedding feast which is an invitation to participate in God's reign where peace, justice and unity prevail. Instead of joyful participation, there is resistance and reluctance to be involved. The consequence is dire as they are not able to be at the table and rejoice in fullness of life but are instead condemned by their decisions to a joyless life of selfishness.

What is needed to bring our Australian community together after the outcome of the referendum?

What is needed was well articulated in this year's Social Justice Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops called "Listen, Learn, Love." They asked for a commitment to listen to our first peoples, to learn from them and to lovingly include them not only in our constitution but also in our community and in our lives.

Once we have the analysis of the outcome of the referendum on the voice there is a requirement for all of us to continue to work for reconciliation with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the first inhabitants of this land.