



Diocese of Port Pirie

Chancery

PO Box 1206, Port Pirie, Sth Australia, 5540
Email: diocoffice@pp.catholic.org.au

Phone: 08 8632 0550

Fax: 08 8632 0599

Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie Lenten Pastoral: Peace on Earth

Dear Brothers & Sisters

We gear ourselves up to celebrate, if that is the word, the Centenary of Gallipoli this year. Newspapers are giving a daily account of an individual young soldier who perished in the Great War. We will see the archive photographs of men at war yet again. Television will run its serials. Public figures once again will praise the courage of the soldiers, and decry the foolishness and waste of war.

Henry Kissinger once wrote "it is not often that nations learn from the past...". So despite the horror and lessons of the twentieth century, peace remains as elusive as the rainbow pot of gold. We think of our present times, with ISIS and its atrocities, Ukraine, Boko Haram, Gaza. For so many of our societies in our world, it still appears that for the leaders of the various factions, it is devastation that is the solution. The Roman historian Tacitus, writing of the Roman wars in Britain, said "they made a desert, and they called it peace".

It is not simply the damage that human beings do to each other. It is the savagery they perpetrate within their own hearts when they do these deeds. How can the leaders of a civilized society enact the cold-blooded judicial murder of two young men before a firing squad? How can one human being, claiming religious motivation, deliberately burn to death a man trapped in a cage? And closer to home, how can family men with children of their own permit other people's children to be kept in detention? Innocence is part of the description of childhood; how can one possibly condone putting innocents into what effectively are prison camps?

We bring to this the message of Jesus – "My peace I leave you, my peace I give to you, a peace the world cannot give. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid". Like prayer, the place of peace is the heart. We Christians have a relatively simple criterion against which we are to assess ourselves. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers". We can assess ourselves as disciples – was there anything of a note of compassion in what I have just said, or the action I have just undertaken? Think of it – the virtue of compassion would eradicate all violence. Malice simply cannot exist if compassion is present.

So we ask ourselves this Lent, is compassion present in my heart, and does it inspire my words and actions? Even concerning asylum seekers and boats? The clarion call of Lent in the liturgy is "repent" meaning convert your hearts. Who and what rules in our heart?

I commend to you again this Lent two practices that will draw us back, remind us that Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. One is to adopt the private practice of abstaining from meat and rich foods on Fridays, and to reduce one's alcohol consumption, the day of the Passion. The second is to see whether your parish can arrange an hour's Exposition before the Blessed Sacrament at some time each week, and go there and stay in the presence of the One we desire to rule our hearts.

Yours in Christ

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

12th February 2015