

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
Jer 20:7-9; Rom 12:1-2; Mt 16:21-27
St Michael's Church, Baulkham Hills
Affinity visit with Noah's Pudding
Patrick McInerney
30 August 2028

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered, the Dharug people. I acknowledge their elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit to walk with them the paths of respect, reconciliation, and recognition.

Thanks

Thank you, Fr Joe, and all of you, for allowing me to address you today.

Welcome & Introduction to Muslim Guests

Special thanks and welcome to our Muslim 'guests'. I note that they are the initiators; we are the respondents; they reached out to us; we are receiving them; they will share Noah's Pudding with us; truly, they are our "hosts", and we are their "guests". Thank you for your generosity and hospitality.

Affinity Intercultural Foundation is a Muslim community organisation that promotes interfaith and social cohesion. They follow the late Turkish Muslim scholar, preacher, and community leader, Fetullah Gülen, who inspired social, educational, charitable, and community organisations around the world.

They are here today to share with us "Noah's Pudding". It is very tasty! I mention it just to whet your appetites, but following an interfaith principle – that we must not speak for others but allow them to speak for themselves – I will leave it to them at the end of Mass to introduce themselves and to explain what "Noah's Pudding" is, how it came about, and its significance for interfaith relations.

Dialogue or death!

I wanted something dramatic to begin my homily, so here it is:

"Dialogue or death"!

I thought it was over-dramatic, but last night I discovered a 1991 article by the late Leonard Swidler, a pioneer of interfaith relations who died on the 23rd of March this year at the age of 97, titled, "*Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*". And the opening sentences are:

The future offers two alternatives: death or dialogue. This statement is not overdramatization.

What is at Stake in Christian-Muslim Relations?

Then I remembered the words of Pope Benedict XVI addressed to Muslim representatives in Cologne in 2005:

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.¹

Two years later, in a letter addressed to Pope Benedict XVI and Christian leaders everywhere entitled “*A Common Word*”, 138 Muslim scholars echoed the Pope’s words as follows:

Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world’s population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world’s inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.²

And then they raised the stakes even higher:

And to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that **our very eternal souls are all also at stake** if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony.

So Christian-Muslim relations are very important indeed, for peace in society, for the survival of the world, and for our eternal destiny.

Christians and Muslims are Not the Same

I don’t pretend that Catholics and Muslims are the same.

- Catholics confess the Blessed Trinity; Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity; the universal salvific significance of his life, death, and resurrection; and the sacramental role of the church in human history, all of which Muslims deny.
- Muslims confess the Prophet Muhammad as the last and final Messenger to the world, confirming and surpassing all who had gone before; and the Holy Qur’an as the literal word of God; neither of which Catholics accept.

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050820_meeting-muslims.html

² <https://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>

But as Pope Leo said after his visit to Algeria last August:

... although we have different beliefs, different ways of worshiping, and different ways of living, we can live together in peace.³

And in March this year, to an interfaith delegation of Christians and Muslims from Africa:

In a world increasingly marked by religious radicalisation, division, and conflict, your common witness shows that it is possible to live and work together in peace and harmony, despite cultural and religious differences.⁴

Burning Hearts

In today's first reading the Prophet Jeremiah speaks of "*a fire burning in my heart*". There is another famous verse in the Bible that speaks of "*hearts burning*". After the risen Jesus revealed himself at the inn in Emmaus, the two disciples said:

"Were not **our hearts burning** within us while he was talking to us on the road ...?" (Lk 24:32)

The Vatican II document on relations with other religions, *Nostra Aetate*, states:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is **true** and **holy** in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect **a ray of that Truth** which enlightens all people. (NA, 2)

And the Vatican II document on mission, *Ad Gentes*, states:

... whatever **truth** and **grace** are to be found among the nations, [is] a sort of **secret presence of God** ... (AG, 9)⁵

We do not find Jesus only in the Bible, the Sacraments, the tabernacle, the Christian community. We find him also *outside* the church. When we approach Muslims and believers in other religions with open hearts and open minds, when we glimpse in them **truth** and **holiness** and **grace**, effects in them of the same Word and Holy Spirit Who are in us, then **our hearts too will burn** in this **secret presence** of the invisible Jesus Who accompanies us on the way.

Sacrifice/Surrender to God

Saint Paul urges the Romans to offer "your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1). This means letting go of our own ideas, hopes, and ambitions, and surrendering to God's purpose in our lives.

³ <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/april/documents/20260415-camerun-voloandata.html>

⁴ <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/march/documents/20260325-procmura.html>

⁵ https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html

Now, “surrender to God” is the meaning of the Arabic word “*islam*”, and “*muslims*” are those who have surrendered their lives to God. In other words, St Paul is encouraging us all to become “*muslims*”, not in the ‘sociological’ sense of affiliation with a particular world religion, but in the ‘theological’ sense of ‘being surrendered to God’; and in that way, we will be following the ideal ‘*muslim*’, Jesus Christ, who in his dying breath prayed:

‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ (Lk 23:46)

Satanic versus Truly Following God

Today’s text from Matthew’s gospel confirms the message.

- To confine or limit God to our own ideas, thoughts, and expectations, no matter how religious or well-meaning, is ‘satanic’.
- To open our minds and hearts to others, and to the Ultimate Other, is to follow God. It is taking up one’s cross, sacrificing oneself for others, taking the lowly place, serving others, washing their feet. It is listening, learning, and loving, all-inclusively, without distinction or reservation, as Jesus commanded:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. (Mt 5:44-45).

Conclusion

The Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement, “*Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division*”, published this month reminds us:

... overcoming division requires the patient work of building relationships, fostering dialogue and recognising and upholding the inherent dignity and worth of every person we meet.⁶

By following the path of self-surrender, of service, and of universal love, we will all – Christian and Muslim – grow into the perfection and mercy of God (c.f. Mt 5:48, Lk 6:36).

Amen.

Thank you.

⁶ <https://acbcwebsite.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/Articles/Documents/ACBC/ACBC+Social+Justice+Statement+-+August+2026.pdf>