

Homily: We are all one in Christ Jesus, (Matthew 2: 1-12)

I've been on holidays for the last month, and of an evening instead of watching television. I've been writing a gospel. Seriously. I've been writing a gospel- Some good news according to Gary. Im doing this because I've been wanting some tool that I could use to share the story of Jesus to the many unbelieving people I meet up with.

In the Army Regiment that I have just taken responsibility for , more than two thirds of the young people entering it have not recorded any religious affiliation on their enlistment documents . It's not likely that I will be able to get them to hear about Jesus by telling them to read the Gospel of Matthew in the first instance, but I might be able to have them read about or hear the story of how God has been operative in my life, and how I have responded to situations with charity . When I started this work of writing, my mentor suggested that I start with a dramatic experience that would grab the reader's attention.

Of course Matthew was facing that same dilemma in his time. When this account of the story of Jesus was recorded about year 80 AD, the believers in Jesus were suffering persecution from both the Jewish authorities, as well as the Roman authorities. People just didn't believe that Jesus had any significance for them. Matthew was wanting to grab the attention of the primarily Jewish audience. So he decided to include a dramatic story, right at the start. He records this extraordinary account of some wise man coming to Jerusalem from the East, probably Persia, following a star that would lead them to the place where the long awaited Messiah would be born .

This was extraordinary, to have these foreigners, perhaps Kings, but certainly Gentiles traveling many miles from a country that had at one stage, taken captive and exiled the Jewish people, now coming to the home of Judaism and wanting to worship one of them. After 1000s of years of infighting between tribes and nations, and deep-seated resentment for anyone who was not of your tribe, Matthew was portraying Jesus as the one who could bring all peoples together, through his message of loving God as well as loving your neighbor. To love your neighbor was radically different to the survival culture these people had been brought up with, but it was the only solution to avoid war without end.

Matthew was telling them that a new era had begun. He was saying that God was revealing God's self to all of humanity. God had given some revelation through the Hebrew Scriptures, but now God was giving revelation to others, and guiding them through their hearts and minds. Matthew portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, who calls all nations to joining together in peace .

Today's letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians gives out this same truth that pagans now share in the same inheritance that the Jewish people had been promised. They are all parts of the same body and the grace of God is to be shared with them. ***The grace that we have been given, is to be shared by us, with them as well.***

This was such an important message then, and it remains so today. The only true way to have peace among peoples, is that we accept each other as brothers and sisters in

humanity; as all being equal, no matter what race or color or religion we have grown up with.

In our parish , we have a good tradition for accepting and integrating people from other races and religions. Our St. Vincent De Paul conference has done excellent work in assisting the settlement of refugees. But in our wider nation, there still remain pockets of racism and exclusion that are quite contrary to the spirit of Jesus. Down at the Gold Coast recently, I witnessed some white Australian prejudice against the Islamic practice of women being modestly dressed. Of course Mary the mother of Jesus would have been similarly modest in her dress. That shouldn't be something people object to.

For some weeks now, The Australian newspaper has been recording a wide range of extreme views on the matter of asylum seekers. Some of the letters to the editor share very little compassion or understanding to the plight of refugees. It is quite embarrassing that there are hundreds of thousands of refugees in muslim Malaysia and Indonesia, and they are received there without prejudice.

Clearly, the asylum seeker debate in Australia is a very complex issue, and is not the topic of this homily. But any Catholic or other Christian , must acknowledge that a good neighbourly, and compassionate response is the only acceptable attitude we can have, in the circumstances. The **nations united** must look to ways that we can provide support for people who have taken the extraordinary step of leaving their homeland. We can ask ourselves too, what attitude would Jesus have . Of course Jesus, Mary and Joseph had to become asylum-seekers themselves, following the visit of the wise men to them, in Bethlehem. It would seem that they were accepted by the people in Egypt until the circumstances in their time country permitted them to return. I'm sure we have greater capacity to accept more refugees than we currently permit. And God will judge us on this issue. He has given us more than what we need in Australia so that we can share it.

So this weekend lets celebrate with joy that all people, and **peoples**, have come into relationship with each other, through the birth of Jesus. Clearly, there will be differences among us, but we must look up on all people as Gods creations, who are loved equally. Many people who have decided as adults to join the Catholic community have mentioned that the one thing that impressed them most about Catholics, and influenced them to join with us , was that we shared concern for the poor and the disadvantaged without preference to a person's race or religion or status. May we continue to live up to that .

The star that led wise man to Jesus still burns brightly today despite the darkness. That star today is us, shining by the light of our example in showing hospitality and welcome to all peoples. Those that have never heard the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John may well become aware of Jesus through a fifth gospel. The gospel according to us. Today we celebrate God is not just with us. God is revealing God self through the life and teachings of Jesus, and our response to them in charity. God embraces each of us as brothers and sisters in humanity. May we be continue to be stars that shine in the darkness of difficult situations. May we draw others to Jesus by our embrace of all peoples . We are all one in Christ Jesus.