

Along the track

All Lives Matter

On Saint Patrick's Day a few years ago I went into an Irish pub somewhere in Melbourne for a quiet Guinness. Only a couple of others were in the bar as I waited for my companion to turn up. One of those in the bar launched a tirade of abuse at me, very loud, aggressive and foul mouthed and seemingly never ending. At one stage I thought he was going to hit me, so when he drew breathe, I asked him what on earth was the problem. He stopped yelling and looked quite shocked. "Is there something I can help you with?" I asked him. "Have we met before?"

He stared at me in disbelief for what seemed like hours and then said "But you're not Irish."
"No, I'm not," I said (my father would disown me for saying that!) and the rather shocked bully turned around and walked out!

What he may have had against the Irish remains a mystery. What is important, however, is that all lives matter, no matter where we are from, what we believe, what we hope and dream for, what we do, what our nationality may be. We are all someone's daughter or son, we belong somewhere, we matter to someone. We are all gifted and talented in our own way, we all have something to give, we are called by God to bring out what is best in us and in others. Every life is as precious as my own.

All human lives are equally precious in God's eyes. As St Paul says in his *Letter to the Galatians* (3,28):
"There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ." God loves us all.

We live in strange times. Divisions are exploited, suspicion of others is fostered and at times a lack of harmony makes a travesty of a nation that prided itself on its multicultural foundations.

A couple of years ago a mosque opened in the town where I live, making use of one of the disused churches. The local Islamic community organised an open day and invited the community to come and see. We turned up in droves and the line up outside was extraordinary. Quite a few of us didn't make it inside but we were made welcome as best they could, consoled by a sausage sizzle and free drinks. As I write this, two days ago another mosque opened in a country town I know well, using an old church that the local Islamic community had purchased after years out of use. Someone set fire to it.

Those sorts of reactions don't come out of nowhere. Where did that sense of welcome, curiosity and acceptance come from? No hostility there. Where did the mistrust come from, the suspicion, the fear that provoked the burning of a house of worship? Mother Teresa wrote that if we have no peace it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other. There's a lot of wisdom there, born out of deep compassion for others, especially those 'rejected' by society.

There is an expression which comes up in Scripture a few times (e.g. Psalm 95), do not harden your hearts. The Israelites were not happy with God – they may have escaped from Egypt but the going was tough. Not enough water, the people in the lands they wandered through were not welcoming, not all that happy to see them. They didn't have much either. In times such as these there was a tendency to hit out at others, to become suspicious and angry, to find fault. But St Paul and others remind us that we have a better story. The story we carry is not about blaming others, rewarding shock or aggression or mistrust as so many digital platforms do, but we carry a story of hope, forgiveness, peace, a story of reaching out to others no matter who they are or where they may come from.

The story we carry starts in our conversations with each other, conversations too around the kitchen table in what is talked about, about how difference is discussed, about what respect is shown to people who may see things differently from us, about people of other faiths, people from other countries and cultures. Each of us needs to start somewhere, to confront those who wish to divide us, those who want to make us suspicious and distrustful.

"This is the missionary spirit that must animate us; not closing ourselves off in our small groups, nor feeling superior to the world. We are called to offer God's love to everyone, in order to achieve that unity which does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the social and religious culture of every people." Pope Leo

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au