

# Voice from the Vicarage 26th February 2023

Dear All,

*The ego has landed...with a bump*

As you may know, now that Fr Jack has flown the coop and is sunning himself in Scotland, I make sure to spend some time with the Thursday lunch crew, and in particular greeting and generally enjoying a bit of conversation with our guests. Public holiday it may be, but the need to feed goes on.

Today I walked on to 260 and the first words were spoken to me by a lovely lady, originally from Europe. Her disappointed tone was as clear as it was searing to my ego. "Where is the *handsome* priest?"

Oh well. I had to rest content with a bitter sweet reassurance from another guest called Mona who overheard the comment. "Don't worry Father, but you have a handsome *soul*..." I accepted and savoured her crumbs of comfort and theological insight, but only for a sweet moment, for she then asked me in the next breath. "Can I have Fr Jack's email. I miss him."

Curates are always more popular than the Vicar, and I suppose it should be so!

Anyway, talking of Jack, his tradition of sartorial elegance, or maybe just his penchant for dressing up continues, and he is clearly inculturating himself to his surroundings... →

Anyway, you'll be glad to know that he is settling in and is already enjoying the dynamic of the University. Soon he'll actually have to start writing his Ph.D.

*So, it's Australia Day.*

One of the most interesting and marked differences between Australia in 1976 when I first left these shores and my return almost forty years later is the increased recognition of the implications of European settlement for those who had already settled here so many thousands of years before.

I studied Australian history at school and in exams did rather well. But that wellness included, as far as I can remember, only a passing reference to the 'dreamtime', a scant regard for the treatment of indigenous people, or little questioning about the morality of the way the British and others approached their rather 'Johnny come lately' discovery and claiming of the territory. When a friend visiting England and was rather miffed to discover Australian wine in the 'New World Wines' section of the local supermarket, I was just amused. But it revealed the European mindset.

I don't need to tell you that there is considerable disagreement about how people living 250 years on should respond to what, to say the very least, is that very mixed history.

However, to my mind, overlaying all that is good about Australia now, and in particular overlaying the descendants of that time with a burden of guilt actually doesn't help, anymore than I would regard it appropriate to make the young people of Germany feel relentlessly guilty or resent their current joy, because of the atrocities or collusion of their great grandparents.

In the context of British history, when I sit in the great building which is the fruit of the Norman Conquest, Durham Cathedral, should I feel shame knowing that it

would never have been built without the inhumanity of the Normans toward the existing Anglo Saxons inhabitants? Surely not.

*Learn, learn, learn...* It's history, and history is so often the story of conquest. What we *do* need to do is learn from it, which is why it should be an essential part of the school curriculum. One thing is the terrible behaviour that ensues when people make themselves an ideology that blinds them to the humanity of others. Sometimes the Church has adopted a convenient blindness to the fundamental doctrine of the dignity of every person, made as they are, in the image of God. After the emergence of the nation state from the end of the 15th century, there were times when the Church colluded with the demand for a national loyalty requiring that blindness. But that religious people do not have a *monopoly* on that blindness is evident to see in any study of modern European history, or in the truly horrific atrocities of the atheistic regimes of the 20th century.

*The courage to forgive...* And into what we learn from history, we must bring the Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. It's our way.

Recently, in relation to the sad history of abuse in the Church, I heard a senior politician say, "We will never, never, never forget what (they) have done."

I do understand. But how does it move us all forward? Will the Church never be able to redeem itself? Will that be the only remembered narrative of what the Church has been and does? For that matter, can modern day Australia ever be redeemed from the shady aspects of its past? Appropriate reparation is important, but there can be no true repairing without forgiveness.

I well understand the difficulties of forgiveness, but it is my duty to forgive and gently but purposefully invite others to do the same. Not forgetting the chequered nature of our Australian history or the terrible behaviour of abusive priests for the purpose of doing better in future, is most surely right. But 'never, never, never' is not enough on which to build our society. Genuine new beginnings and a healthy society requires the costly act of forgiveness. And we need to help each other forgive.

Changing the date of Australia Day *might* simply be a help on that journey. Could it be seen as nobody's victory, but just a help? Mmm. Not sure.

Well, just a few thoughts from me on a difficult subject.

Much love, +Lindsay



*Jack borrowed the Vicar's kilt made of the clergy tartan for a Burn's night dinner.*