

Commemorative Mass 5th Anniversary of Bali Bombing

Saint Francis Xavier's Cathedral

Friday 12th October 2007-



Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ,
Auxiliary Bishop of Adelaide

We gather on a day that has touched so many. In the first place are the families of the victims, and the loved ones they lost. But there are also the survivors, some of whom still carry the mental scars and the dreams at night. It is surprising how many families were touched by this tragedy, from the neighbours next door whose sister-in-law lost a son, to teachers like myself, knowing former students who managed to walk away unscathed physically. Why has Bali become such a powerful anniversary for us, so soon and so quickly? There is the shock of the event, the scope of the loss, 88 young Australians killed and so many wounded, and the birth of a new reality of dread, the dawn of the realisation that for some people we were no longer friends, but had become targets.

Bali affronted us. We have been, and are, the lucky country, a nation blessed largely by peace, a people rare among the world, because we have never known civil war, with citizens taking up arms against brother and sister citizens. As Europeans, we have never known foreign invasion. We have been proud that the old scores of Europe and the Middle East and Asia are largely left behind by those who come to our shores, be they the Catholics and the Protestants from Northern Ireland, the people from Israel and Palestine, the Serbs and the Croatians, the Greeks and Turks of Cyprus, all these people have come to build up this nation, and have left the violence behind.

So Bali was a trauma for us as a nation, we had to learn a horror of sadness for the loving families who sent their young people off for a holiday of relaxation and enjoyment, and who never returned alive.

There have been a number of episodes in our relatively short history as a nation that have called us to account, challenged us when we got around to reflecting on them, that what do we perceive humanity to be, what is it to be a human being, how do we act in this world, and how do we treat those who would do us harm? As Christians, we hold the conviction that the Glory of God is a human being fully alive, then we have had to consider how do we respond to those terrorist whose view of life contains

no notions of reverence, or sacredness, of the inviolability of life, who do not share our faith that life is the gift of God, not to be taken away by man.

At the outset, in our Australian history, there were the murderous encounters from time to time between Europeans and the Indigenous Australians and it took the Europeans so long to consider what respect must be paid to the humanity of others. For too long we managed to bury these incidents in our consciousness. There was the shock of the First World War, with the slaughter of our youth, and Australia carrying a larger proportion of casualties than most countries, more even proportionately than England and France. The Avenues of Honours, the lists of names in the smallest of country towns, continue to bear stark witness to the defoliation of our humanity that the First World War was. There was the bombing of Darwin, an incredible shock to us. We were no longer safe. In the decades since that War, Bali stands out as the moment of great shock. There was the death of the 202, of whom 88 were Australians, and the injury of so many more. Different to the episodes of horror listed above, which took place in times of conflict, Bali took place as a different type of conflict, a conflict of ideologies rather than of physical confrontation. We know that what happened was a time of incredible suffering for so many families. This was not a time of war. But instead there was the cruelty of the slaying of the innocent, a deliberate murdering of the unsuspecting and the defenceless. We also know that we want to avoid any cycle of revenge; we know that blood does not wipe out blood, that more blood will not cleanse the first blood.

We come now in prayer before the God of Life and of Love, before the Christ, the most innocent of men, who died a death of agony, but instructed us to pray for the strength and grace to forgive our enemies. We come in sadness to remember the slaughter of our youth, and to be a strength and consolation through our presence and prayers for the families who lost their young ones. We pray not only for our own, but for the Balinese people who were caught up in this murder, the sons and daughters of the Balinese people who were there at the time helping to enable our own youth to celebrate, working as drivers, kitchen hands, waiters, and so on, all caught up in an outrageous act of murder.

We remember Bali in order to mourn those who have died. We remember this anniversary in order to help console those who lost family. We remember this anniversary in order to learn, so that we might endeavour to work for a world where its ideologies will not clash, but will cohere, for the sake of the human family, not to destroy it. We come to mourn, and Christ said, “Blessed are those who mourn”. They are blessed because they have known love, and were privileged to have the love of those they lost, whether it was for many or a few years.

Christ the Teacher told us in the Gospel that the peacemakers are blessed, for they shall be called the Sons and Daughters of God. Revenge must not breed revenge, and to be a peacemaker is truly to be called a Son or Daughter of God, because it demands the strength and the vocation to rise above the ordinary. Christ taught us, “Blessed are the gentle”, for they shall have the task of making the Earth whole, of bringing the world into unity. And there is the great challenge, “Blessed are the merciful”.

So as we gather here in sadness and wistfulness, we recall again that life is sacred, given by God, a gift He gives forever. We do not want the violence of revenge. It would demean us as human beings to sink to the levels of violence that those who murdered our young people went down to. As Christians, we are not in the business of an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. Christ calls us to rise above that. Violence is not dissipated by further violence. Blood is not erased by blood. We do not want to hurt or despoil the memory and love of those we lost by promoting any cause that would cause further death.

Instead, we pray to commit ourselves to lives that will bring, in the words of the First Reading, integrity into the fertile land, and integrity will bring peace, a justice that will bring peace, and work so that the conflict of ideologies will be reduced, and the people of God will live in a peaceful home, in safe houses, in quiet dwellings. And we shall carry in our hearts the tenderness of the love of those we lost, praying to them that as they now rejoice in the fullness of life, knowing what Christ said, that He came that we might have life, and have it to the full, in a world beyond the Gate of Death. For the sake of those who loved and lost, may God help us be builders of peace in this world that He loved much that He gave His Only Son. That is the finest and most Christian of ways to pay tribute to our dead and their families.

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