

2 February 2014

Last weekend, we celebrated Australia Day. We celebrated all that is good about this country as well as acknowledging some of the challenges we face as a nation, especially our relationship with the original inhabitants of this land, our indigenous brothers and sisters. I was particularly inspired to see news reports of the various citizenship ceremonies around the country, in particular, that Victoria had the highest rate of individuals becoming Australian citizens. And in those ceremonies, I was particularly touched to see people of so many different countries and cultures – African, European, Asian, Latin America and the Pacific Islands – all promising their loyalty and allegiance to their new country. What a proud moment for all of us as a nation.

Christians should have an affinity for such ceremonies because it is exactly like adults and children coming forward for Baptism and seeking to be welcomed into the Catholic Church. Something moves them to take a step on their faith journey. Some incident, or experience or individual plays a key role in terms of seeking God and seeking to belong to a particular faith community. Sometimes it is a burning spiritual question, perhaps unresolved, that makes them take this step. It is often a very major decision for adults and is not always welcomed so warmly when their family belongs to another faith tradition. And in seeking baptism or admission into the Catholic Church, we see this great cultural diversity every year before Easter at St Patrick's Cathedral. And in a great cosmopolitan and multicultural city like Melbourne, it is a joy to behold.

Today the Church celebrates the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Just like the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John the Baptist, here Jesus is being presented as the Son of God, someone sent by the Father, entrusted with a mission, sent to proclaim good news to the nations, sent to make known the joys of God's kingdom. This mission is to be made known to all the world. And if it is important for Jesus, then surely it is important for each of us. Every time the Church celebrates a sacrament or someone is baptized, we are making known to all that faith is important, the gift of faith changes our lives, that the Spirit of Jesus is at work shaping us as his disciples.

The readings today have this important sense of mission and of being sent. The life of faith, the gift of faith is not some mysterious secret but takes concrete shape in our lives – lives of prayer, lives of service, lives that deepen and knowledge and love of Jesus, lives of justice, lives that concern ourselves with the poor, the marginalized and the outcast. We are called to make known the light of faith given to us in Baptism, that light which is our sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Prompted by the Spirit that brought Jesus to the temple, we gather here to be nourished by God's saving word, to celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and salvation, to nourish each other in the daily struggle of life and faith and to always hold firm in our belief that the God of love holds us always in the palm of his hand.