

Harmony Week Family Prayer

by Rachel McLean, Director Identity and Outreach



With stillness and respect, we acknowledge Traditional Owners of the lands on which you are reading and reflecting on this prayer, the First Peoples from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations. These First Peoples have walked upon and cared for land, seas, skies and waterways for thousands of years. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of the First Nations Peoples to Country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey that the Uluru Statement from the Heart invites us to journey through. Today, spend some time listening to Andrew Chinn and the students from St Therese's in Wilcannia NSW sing [Ancient Legacy](#) as they show us how we can all work together for Truth-telling, Healing and Reconciliation.

Context

Harmony Week

March 18-24th is Harmony Week, which celebrates the cultural diversity that exists in Australia. Established in 1999 by the Australian Government, Harmony Week aims to recognise Australia as a vibrant, multicultural nation and foster inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging in everyone. The theme for Harmony Week 2024 is everyone belongs. Harmony Week also coincides with the [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) (IDERD).^[1] The United Nations General Assembly established this date in response to the terrible events of 21 March 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, where police killed 69 people during a demonstration opposing the apartheid laws. As we celebrate Harmony Week, it is important to remember this broader social and historical context of harm and oppression that Harmony Week endeavours to overcome by inviting us into dialogue and celebration with those who make up the fullness of our global community.



The Disciples at Emmaus (oil on canvas). oil on canvas. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016. quest.eb.com/images/108_4071154. Accessed 20 Mar 2024.

Scripture

John 8:1-11

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. [2] At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. [3] The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group [4] and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. [5] In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" [6] They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. [7] When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." [8] Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

[9] At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. [10] Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

[11] "No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

The Gospel reading that has been chosen for the Parent Prayer and Reflection is from the Lectionary for 18 March; this is the reading that Catholics all around the world hear and reflect on when they attend Mass or pray the Readings of the Day. There is a providence in having this reading on the day that Australia commences their 'celebration of Harmony Week.' The Gospel invites us to consider deep truths; about ourselves, others and the society that we have all played a role in shaping.

As you read in the context above, Harmony Week coincides with the [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) (IDERD) and there is a growing sentiment that Harmony Week in Australia "...is akin to putting a band aid over a broken limb," as the focus is on "happy, harmonious cross-cultural celebrations," rather than addressing "the root causes of pain and illness." [ii] This criticism stems from the Government's rationale of introducing Harmony Week "which sought to replace the IDERD and portray a unified multicultural society, one that did not need to actively combat racism." [iii]

In his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis laments that "instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think." [iv] So, does celebrating Harmony Week mean that we are ignoring the inherent problem of racism in Australia? Are we (intentionally or unintentionally) obscuring the need for systemic change by wearing orange? By hosting a morning tea this Harmony Week, does this make us complicit in the problem?

When considered through a Catholic lens, Harmony Week offers valuable opportunities for our society to engage in meaningful discussions about the harmful effects of racism and foreground that every person is equally and abundantly loved by God.

Coming together around the table to share a meal need not be simply a feel-good, albeit empty gesture. "A meal together cements friendship, expresses care and consideration, and produces *koinonia* (communion, sharing, togetherness)." [v] The Gospels provide evidence of the power of Jesus' [table hospitality](#) [vi] and fellowship, where he challenged social and cultural codes and revealed a vision for a non-discriminatory society. "This fellowship was not only an expression of his solidarity with the sinners, outcasts, and poor, but also a proclamation of his protest against the socio-religious structures that supported the discrimination." [vii] Perhaps there is hope for the humble morning tea after all.

More important than what is on the menu for morning tea is the content discussed during this *koinonia*. In addition to learning about other cultures, Harmony Week also serves as a valuable reminder that, as Australians, we need to understand more about our shared and often uncomfortable history. Pope Francis emphasises that "I can welcome others who are different, and value the unique contribution they have to make, only if I am firmly rooted in my own people and culture." [viii] Schools in CEDC provide opportunities for students to reflect on the importance of their sense of self and belonging, as "there can be no dialogue with 'others' without a sense of our own identity." [ix] This means we also help students acknowledge the intergenerational trauma of Australia's First Nations peoples and committing authentically to truth-telling, healing and reconciliation; this is tough work and can only be progressed when we are in partnership with families. You are welcome to earnestly celebrate the successes, humbly and honestly acknowledge the gaps and bravely commit to small and meaningful ways to transform these rich conversations into action.

Prayer

Loving God, you have created each us in your image and likeness and so we are different expressions of your love. Help us to appreciate each other's difference so that we create in our community, understanding, peace and harmony. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus your Son in whose Spirit we are all one. Amen.

Call to Action

- Peg and Cat sing a song about how they can [count on each other for help](#). Have a discussion with your family about the friends or family in your life that you can count on.
- Listen to "[I Have A Voice](#)" and have a conversation with your children about the voice in they have in our community and reflect on what ways we can listen more deeply to what it is they want us to hear.
- Check out the [Harmony Week Website](#) (Australian Government – Department of Home Affairs) and the resources listed below which helped Sharee write her reflection for Harmony Week.

Article Source Material

[i] United Nations, "International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 21 March," last accessed 20 February, 2024. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-racism-day>

[ii] Laforteza, Elaine, "What's the harm in Harmony Day?" University of Technology Sydney <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/social-justice-sustainability/whats-harm-harmony-day>

[iii] Butler, Dan, "It's the International Day of Eliminating Racial Discrimination. Why does Australia call it 'Harmony Day'?" NITV. Updated 21 March, 2023. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/its-the-day-for-elimination-of-racism-why-does-australia-call-it-harmony-day/nrexxh21>

[iv] Francis. "On Fraternity and Social Friendship," Fratelli Tutti, Encyclical Letter, 20. Vatican website. Last updated 3 October, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

[v] Knox, Ian. Theology for Teachers. Quezon City: Phil: Claretian Publications, 2003.

[vi] Brisbane Catholic Education, "Table Hospitality," Catholic Identity, last updated 22 May, 2020.

<https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/scripture/SitePages/Table-hospitality.aspx?csf=1&e=N6ID8K>

[vii] Velankanni, Francis. "The Eucharist and Table Fellowship in the New Testament." Last updated 18 December, 2013. <https://catholicmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/The-Eucharist-and-Table-Fellowship.pdf>

[viii] Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 143.

[ix] Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 143.