



REFLECTION

FOR WE ARE ONE AND FREE

During the summer we made a one-word change to the lyric of the National Anthem. “We are young and free” became “We are one and free.” The change was greeted with approval by many, probably not noticed by just as many and some commented that the change was not adequate.

The change means to include our First Nations people, the oldest surviving culture in the world who were seen to be excluded from the lyric of the song when it claimed we are all “young.”

Just changing one word could be seen to be cosmetic, a kind of window dressing. On the other hand it could be understood as a serious and significant attempt to redress the injustice implied by the old lyric.

Whatever the case, words are powerful as we know, and the repetition of the new lyric into the future could gently infuse into our minds and imaginations, an awareness of the wider national community.

The usual debates about Australia Day have surfaced again this time round. Do we change the date? Do we call it something else? How do we acknowledge the heritage and stories of all who live here? How can we be one and free, really?

This claim that we are one and free is aspirational and far from the truth of things. For instance, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3% of the nation’s population yet account for 29% of the population of our prisons. Something is seriously amiss here and in need of attention.

A few refugees were quietly released into the community last week and were given six-month visas. What happens to them then is anyone’s guess as is the fate of several hundred people seeking refuge still being

incarcerated at extraordinary cost financially and at unnecessary damage to the wellbeing of each of those people.

Reports of domestic violence have increased during the pandemic and unemployment is still the lots of many Australians.

These are just a few headlines that remind us that we are not yet one and free. Thoughtfully singing out our hope to be one and free in the national anthem may become one way of reminding us of the disunity that we still need to address and resolve. There's no harm in being hopeful!

Hopes for healing, respect and harmony were expressed during President Biden's recent inauguration, in speeches, poetry and song, crying out for unity in a deeply divided nation.

It's very easy to sit back and regard such aspirations and nothing more than a pipe dream. We can write them off as being impossible to attain and absolve ourselves from giving expression to these hopes in our own lives. We think that people expressing such grandiose hopes would do well to get real and accept that such dreams are simply beyond our reach.

One's memory then harks back to the Last Supper where Jesus in his great priestly prayer yearns for the unity of his friends:

"Father, may they be one as I am in you and you are in me. May they be so completely one that the world will know that it is you who sent me."

All these centuries later we find ourselves divided in so many ways between and within churches and in smaller communities. The scandalous argie-bargy that goes on in high places in the Church as ideologies rather than faith seek to control rather than serve, reminds us that we have much to do if Jesus' great prayer is to be something more than a futile pipe dream.

There's no harm in being hopeful and there is everything to gain by committing ourselves to that hope as nations, churches and families.

The family, our home ground if you like, is the perfect place to start! If in each of our families we grow to be truly one and free, our hope for others will take on a more realistic shape and who know what unity might be born.

Father Kevin

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