

Homily for Australia Day 2026

Readings:

1. Isaiah 32:15-18
2. Romans 12:9-13
3. Luke 12:22-32

What are the distinctive features of our nation Australia? Many people now recognise that there are three epic strands in our shared history. These are our Indigenous heritage, our British inheritance, and our multicultural achievement. Let me speak about each of these distinctive features of Australia:

First of all, there's our Indigenous heritage. Aboriginal people have lived in this land for at least 60,000 years. However, if we're honest, we have to recognise that the British colonisation of Australia which began in 1788 has caused great suffering for our First Peoples. That's why we talk about Reconciliation – Reconciliation which attempts to redress the wrongs which Indigenous Peoples have suffered since colonisation. On this front, a lot has happened in Victoria over the last year. In July last year, the Yoorrook Justice Commission released its final report – its *truth-telling* report – which set out in detail what has happened to Indigenous Peoples here since colonisation. Then, on the 13th of November last year, the Government of Victoria enacted a Treaty with our First Peoples. This established Gellung Warl and the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria as an official Voice to Parliament which advises about matters concerning our First Peoples. All this has given hope to the Indigenous Peoples of this state – hope that the wrongs of the past might be addressed, hope for a better future for them and for all Victorians. What is your attitude to these developments? I think our challenge is to honestly recognise the wrongs of the past, and to dare to hope that these developments will make things better. Perhaps that's something which we can all think about on this Australia Day.

The second distinctive feature of Australia is our British inheritance. This has given us the system of government which is the backbone of our nation. It's given us the rule of law. It also means that in so many ways this nation recognises human rights. But at this time this feature of Australia is under some threat. At this time, a movement called populism is sweeping the world. Populism tells people that they're missing out, and the only solution is to elect a populist leader who will do away with all the usual conventions of good government. But when the rule of law is broken – when human rights are ignored – those who will suffer the most are those most at the margins. It is happening elsewhere in this world, and it could happen in Australia. So perhaps, another challenge for us on this Australia Day is to hold fast to our British inheritance, and to uphold the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The third distinctive feature of Australia is our multicultural achievement. We are one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. And we are multi-cultural: we recognise that this great diversity of cultures and traditions enriches us all. But there are challenges here too. What happened at Bondi Beach on the 14th of December last year revealed very clearly that anti-Semitism exists in Australia. What is more, recent attacks on Muslim people have also revealed that Islamophobia also exists in this land. And perhaps, there is also growing intolerance in this land – intolerance of anyone who is different from us. So perhaps a third

challenge for us on this Australia Day is to celebrate the diversity of Australia, and to reach out and befriend people who come from different cultures to our own. It's also about having the courage to challenge the haters – to try to show that there's a better way than seeing anyone who is different only as a threat.

Our Indigenous heritage. Our British inheritance. Our multicultural achievement. These are distinctive features of Australia. Our challenge on this Australia Day is to do what we can to preserve and develop each of these great features of this land Australia. That's what our Readings said to us today. "Let justice come to live here," our First Reading said. "Don't let your love be a pretence," St Paul said in the Second Reading, adding that we should "have a profound respect" for one another. And our Gospel told us not to be too focussed just on ourselves, but instead to believe and trust in God. Are you able to believe and trust that God will give us all the things that we really need? Are you able to focus instead not on what we want, but on playing our part in the establishment of God's kingdom – God's kingdom of justice and peace? That's perhaps the deepest challenge which we face on this Australia Day.

As we celebrate Australia Day today, let us therefore reflect on our Indigenous heritage, our British inheritance, and our multicultural achievement. And let us resolve to do what we can to make our land Australia a better and fairer nation. 2026 stretches before us. What will you do this year to support our Indigenous Peoples, to uphold human rights and the rule of law, and to celebrate the multicultural diversity of our land?

Fr Kevin McGovern,
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