

25 October

During the week there has been an outpouring of love for Helen Haines, the independent federal member for north-eastern Victoria after a shocking incident on Monday. Helen Haines was simply going about her business as the local elected member of parliament when she was seriously injured. Now she, her family and the community Helen represents are surrounded by an extraordinary bond of love and affection from across the nation. That bond of love is also mixed with a fierce determination that our political discourse in Australia must improve, must be more respectful, must reject every form of violence, harassment and anything that demeans a person's human dignity.

As Christians, we hear the call of Jesus to love God and to love our neighbour with all our heart, and soul and mind. We don't only do this when there is a community emergency or a national disaster. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to do this all the time. It is the mark of one who calls themselves a disciple. This call, this gift, this grace first came to us in the saving waters of baptism. The journey of the spiritual life is to keep growing in the love of Jesus and to make that love known to others. Today, a number of children will celebrate their first Reconciliation in preparation for their first Eucharist next year. All the sacraments, for young and old alike, put us in touch with the saving love of Jesus. Every sacrament, every step on the journey means that we are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

It is in moments like we have experienced this week that we re-double our efforts to love God and our neighbour with all our heart, and soul and mind. We re-double our efforts to be people of peace, people who work for justice, people committed to the Gospel values of hope and joy, people who pray for the gift of wisdom for our political leaders that they will always work for the common good of all, and that they will seek the path of harmony and reconciliation and go beyond political point-scoring to embrace a grand vision for our country. Now more than ever, our community needs leaders who will step up to this task with courage and fierce determination. And we as citizens have our role to play. When we celebrate the sacraments, we celebrate the gift of Jesus who brings peace by his death on the cross. Jesus is the one who in his death transforms the violence of the cross into the sacrament of God's saving love for our world. He reconciles in himself all human division. Our world today needs leaders who are committed to healing division, who seek

paths of dialogue and consensus, who bring different voices around the table, who state with a strong voice, 'This behaviour is not acceptable'.

The future today belongs to those who can inspire hope in our community and our nation. During the week, I was in touch with a friend of mine who knows Helen Haines and who worked on her election campaign. The text message I received was; 'What an enormous price she has paid to be a public servant whose tenure was marked by compassion, integrity and kindness'. Our community is a better place because of people like Helen Haines; we are all diminished because of what has happened to her.

Today's Gospel about love of God and love of our neighbour is closely tied to our first reading from the book of Exodus; God speaks out against those who mistreat or oppress others, those who are harsh with the widow and orphan and we are told that God will hear their cry. This is where the Church gets its tradition of Catholic social justice principles. We are called to advocate for the voiceless and the marginalized, to work always for the common good, to seek the path of unity and reconciliation. Today, modern society is very aware of human rights but as a people who belong to a faith tradition, the Bible for us contains many stories about protecting human rights, protecting the dignity of the vulnerable, never taking advantage of those who are marginalized in society and always acting with mercy, justice and compassion. Every time we open the scriptures, every time we celebrate a sacrament whether for a big crowd or a small crowd, we are in touch with these values of mercy, justice and compassion. The call of Jesus takes us back to the gift of our baptism because in those saving waters, our life of discipleship emerged. Today, in this celebration, our life of discipleship is strengthened.

As we gather to celebrate the Eucharist and to pray for our children on their journey of faith, we re-commit ourselves to be people who carry the love of Jesus deep in our hearts; a transforming love; a love that brings light; a love that brings Gospel hope; a love that brings peace. Like St Paul in today's second reading, we are filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit that enables us to take the Gospel seriously in our lives. Today, in this celebration, we renew our call and commitment as a people of justice, love and peace who bring God's hope to our world.