

Homily for the Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Readings:

1. II Kings 5:14-17
2. II Tim 2:8-13
3. Luke 17:11-19

Homily by Fr Kevin McGovern at the Sunday Masses at St Cecilia's, Camberwell South on 12 October 2025:

Today, both our First Reading and our Gospel invite us and, indeed, challenge us, to think about people who belong to different racial groups from our own. The Jews of Jesus' time despised, shunned and even hated the Samaritans. But when Jesus cured ten lepers in today's Gospel, only one of those hated Samaritans came back to thank Jesus and to praise God. It must have annoyed the Jews so much that only the person who did the right thing was the one they despised.

In today's First Reading, the prophet Elisha cured leprosy in a Syrian named Naaman. Another person from a different racial group. Jesus had spoken about Naaman in his very first homily in his hometown of Nazareth. He told the people that there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cured, only that Syrian named Naaman. And the crowd in the synagogue were filled with rage, and they dragged Jesus to the top of a cliff, and they were going to hurl him off the cliff. (Lk 4:27-29)

And from this, we're reminded that thinking about people from other racial groups can stir up powerful emotions. The Jews of Jesus' time despised, shunned and even hated the Samaritans. And even now, many people hold powerful negative views about people who belong to different racial groups from their own. They truly do despise them. They refuse to accept that there might be any good human qualities in them. And they attribute to them all the wrongs and vices that we know. They say, "They're criminals. They're thieves. They bludge off the public purse. They're lazy, and they're contemptible in so many other ways." These ugly attitudes have an ugly name. This is racism. And truth be told, racism still persists in our country and in our world.

In this context, I want to speak to you about something which is about to happen in Victoria. The Government of Victoria and the First Peoples of Victoria are about to sign a treaty. And the bill to enable this is about to be debated in Victorian Parliament. Now, there certainly are many matters which have to be considered as we move towards this treaty. But at this time, we're also about to see an upsurge in ugly racist views as people try to prevent the treaty through spreading misinformation and stirring up fear.

Let me share with you the path which has led to this treaty. This path began almost a decade ago in 2016. In that year, the Victorian Government made a commitment to enter into discussions about a treaty with the First Peoples of Victoria. This in turn led to the establishment in 2019 of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. Its members are elected, and represent the First Peoples from across Victoria. Then, in 2021, the Yoorrook Justice Commission was established to find and publish the truth of what has happened to our First Peoples since European colonisation. And a year later, in 2022, the Treaty Authority was established to negotiate a treaty between the Victorian Government and the First Peoples' Assembly. All these plans – all this work – is coming to fruition now. The Yoorrook Justice Commission released its report in July this year. And the treaty is now prepared to be debated in the Victorian Parliament.

Let me make a comment about all this. I've just given you almost ten years of history. Most of us haven't

heard too much about all this, and we might feel a bit startled and a bit overwhelmed. And because we're startled and a bit overwhelmed, it might be tempting to react negatively to all this. And indeed, there will at this time be an upsurge in racist propaganda. The Yoorrook Justice Commission reported on massacres of First Peoples since colonisation; people will try to tell us that these massacres didn't happen. When land rights were introduced in 1993, people tried to tell us that Aboriginal people would be taking our back yards. And now, they'll try to frighten us with talk of huge reparations which will have to be paid to the First Peoples. And so on. As I've said, there certainly are matters which must be considered as we move towards treaty. But there will also be a lot of racist propaganda. In all this, please resist the temptation to become overwhelmed and react negatively. Please instead make a commitment to educate yourself about the treaty, and to develop a view about it which is based on both reason and Christian love.

Just this last week, Pope Leo issued his first Apostolic Exhortation. It's called *Dilexi te*, and it's about 'Love for the Poor'. And let me quote what Leo said about Christian love. "Christian love," Pope Leo said, "breaks down every barrier, brings close those who are distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies. It spans chasms that are humanly impossible to bridge, and it penetrates to the most hidden crevices of society... It makes what was apparently impossible happen. A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today." (*Dilexi te*, n. 120)

Let's heed Leo's call. As our state debates treaty, let us not be alarmed, and above all let us not yield to racist propaganda. Instead, in this matter as in every matter, let us break down every barrier with that great power – the great power of Christian love.
