

## Fr Kevin's homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent on the Bondi Beach attack

### Readings:

1. Isaiah 7:110-14
2. Romans 1:1-7
3. Matthew 1:18-24

What happened at Bondi Beach last Sunday evening has appalled and horrified all decent people. A group of Jewish people had gathered to celebrate the first night of Hanukkah. And they were attacked – attacked in an act of violence and hatred. It was antisemitism – hateful prejudice against Jewish people.

In his statement about this, our own archbishop, Archbishop Peter Comensoli, called this an “evil act of violence against our Jewish friends.” He continued, “I stand in unequivocal solidarity with the Jewish community in Australia, and reach out in sorrow, friendship and resolve. I call upon all people of good will to do the same... We must choose to be present, to pray, and to stand in solidarity.”

During the week, we've been reminded that Jewish people in Australia live with antisemitism all the time. Here in Melbourne, Jewish schools and synagogues now need armed guards. Here in Melbourne, Jewish families calculate the risk before attending public celebrations. Decisive action must be taken to rid our country of the scourge of antisemitism. We Catholics don't need armed guards at our own school. We don't need armed guards outside our church. Decisive action must be taken so that our Jewish friends are also able to educate their children and practise their faith without fear. This action must include criminal sanctions against those who advocate violence and those who perpetrate violence. It must also involve education so that we can all recognise antisemitism, and so we're all prepared to call out antisemitism as unacceptable and wrong. Anything less than this would be un-Australian. Anything less than this would betray the multicultural values which are truly Australian. Our horror at what has happened must empower us to root out antisemitism, and to do so firmly, resolutely and constantly.

There's another challenge which we also face. Archbishop Tim Costelloe of Perth is the President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, and in his statement about the Bondi Beach attack, Archbishop Costelloe alerted us to this second challenge. He wrote, “As our nation confronts this tragedy, we must work hard to ensure that the justifiable anger [that] we feel does not breed even more violence and hatred.” I believe that Archbishop Costelloe is warning us about Islamophobia. Antisemitism is prejudice and hatred directed towards Jewish people. Islamophobia is prejudice and hatred directed towards Muslim people. And both forms of prejudice and hatred are unacceptable. We need to remember that many Muslims are as appalled as we are by the attack on Bondi Beach. It would be wrong to blame all Muslims for this act of terrorism. It would be especially wrong if this attack led to prejudice and violence directed at Muslim people. I heard good Muslim leaders speak about this last week. They were particularly afraid that this violence could be directed against Muslim women who wear the veil. And it would be so wrong if violence and hatred against one group of people led to more violence and hatred against another group of people. That too would be un-Australian. That too would be unacceptable and wrong. And just as determined action is

needed to rid our country of the scourge of antisemitism, other determined action is needed to rid our country of the scourge of Islamophobia.

Where do we find the courage and the faith to take these steps to root out both antisemitism and Islamophobia? That's where the readings which we've just listened to – the readings of this Fourth Sunday of Advent – are so important. Our First Reading gave us the great sign. It told us that the maiden is with child; and that she will soon give birth to a son. It told us that this child – this son – will be called Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. That child is Jesus. He is the Prince of Peace. And Jesus calls us to recognise that each and every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. He calls us to respect each and every human being with the same respect that we have for him. He has told us, "In so far as you do this to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you do it to me." It is the message of Jesus which calls us to treat those who are different from us with profound respect. How could we be Christian – how could we truly be Catholic – if we failed to do this?

In the name of Jesus – in the name of the Prince of Peace – let me conclude this reflection by sharing with you the last sentence of Archbishop Costelloe's message. For Archbishop Costelloe wrote, "We join with all who condemn this terrible violence and plead with all Australians to reject any impulse towards hatred and violence and instead to commit ourselves to being peacemakers in our families, amongst our friends, and in the wider society."

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