



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Easter and the universality of forgiveness at a pivotal moment in our nation's history

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Forgiveness from the heart is profoundly beneficial and very demanding. That is why the Cross is such an enduring symbol. Both on Good Friday and then, thankfully, the Easter Sunday Cross, garlanded with flowers.

An artist friend interviewed folk after a terrible massacre. One person said she couldn't get the perpetrator out of her head. Not particularly devout, she had a blurred memory of Jesus' words about forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer. She began a kind of mantra, saying over the name of the person and adding, "I forgive you". She would do this when doing ordinary domestic things and whenever the memory came to mind. She told my friend that, over time, she ceased to be obsessed with this matter. Her heart was calmer. She became freer of the impact of that person.

Nelson Mandela once said that "hating someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die"! Some friends and I quoted this in our Forgiveness: A Study Guide.

https://cdn.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3944378/2-FINAL-Forgiveness-A-Study-Guide-E-book.pdf

We have been gathering more such stories, as people have shared. Stories, for example, about the beneficial but demanding journey to forgive parents, long dead; stories coming from the experience of racism; refugee stories and many others.

I gave our studies to friends of other faith traditions, explaining first that our framework is personal and deeply Christian. Their responses were very kind and encouraging, reinforcing to me, from their traditions, the universality of this matter. As a friend says, recognising that forgiveness is both beneficial and demanding, passes both the pub test and the pew test!

The start of the Federal election campaign is coinciding with significant religious festivals - Passover, Ramadan, the Sikh celebration of Vaisakhi as well as Easter. We are encouraged to think, from these spiritual traditions, about how our nation might be one that heals and never harms; one that is more giving and forgiving. Higher thinking encourages us to ask ourselves this question: With inspired spiritual and political leadership, what might Australia become?

When South Africa had the happy coincidence of leaders with both character and competency they could attempt what few others have even tried: to forgive the past in order to survive the future. Aware of the importance of forgiveness and of how connected we are to one another, Nelson Mandela asked then, "are you going to enable the community around you to be able to improve?"

We know we need to improve. A myriad of recent Royal Commissions tells us that. We know our survival is threatened by matters that need inspired leadership if we are to have a more just peace

in a sustainable environment. The anxiety caused by the pandemic is now amplified by war and by mounting evidence of catastrophic climate change.

Sadly, the expectation is that the election campaign will not bring healing and hope but rather, will involve endless banal venom and a remorseless pursuit of “gotcha moments”.

As in our personal lives so in the life of our nation-the choice is ours. The spiritual wisdom of the ages encourages us to transcend difficulties by creating beauty, being truthful and kind (in a quiet way). To be inspired and inspiring like this, we learn the need to attend to any matter sitting unforgiven in our soul. Including matters of self-forgiveness.

Like the woman with her mantra and a rather foggy memory of Jesus’ encouragement to forgive from our hearts, this will clear the way to a better future for one and all.

What might we then become on this island now called Australia?



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