Discrimination sermon

No matter the number of laws our parliaments pass to outlaw the practice, there’s lots of forms of discrimination in our society … no matter which society you live in. We find it in our workplaces where women make up such a small percentage of the boards of major companies; we see it in sport, where only a few years ago, Australia’s own national women’s soccer team, the Matildas, did a nude photo calendar shoot to raise money to attend the world championships. The pollies who ignored their plight should be ashamed.

In our own church, in Australia known as the Liberal Catholic Church International, we do not discriminate on the basis of gender nor lifestyle, and we encourage our brothers to think along the same lines, because sadly, in matters religious, we still very much do discriminate … when we know we shouldn’t for as St Paul wrote in Romans … “for in Christ Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free”. We are all one under the law of God, as we heard in our Epistle today.

And such discrimination is not confined to the approaches of developing or new-age groups … some well-established religions of thousands of years standing and some sub-groups within such established religions are still ultra conservative, and many of these views have been handed down for centuries and are now kinda set in stone.

And sadly, many of these were initially founded on a fallacy or a collections of half-truths, and these views, unfounded as they were, are still vigorously defended.

Here’s a sad story Vicki found for me … it was a post on one of our groups, so I’ll remove identifying details, and edit accordingly. The author writes … today my wife and I were informed that our son would not be able to make his first communion this year.

As most of you know, our son is an autistic non-verbal child and as he is of age, he is in his sacrament year. Our parish priest at our church in a central US state, and the Archdiocese as well, came to this position since they decided to interpret that our son is unable to determine right from wrong due to his disability, so they feel he is not up to the “benchmark required to make his first communion.”

This is very hard and upsetting to comprehend when we all are created by God in His Image, and now our son is being shunned by the Roman Catholic faith due to his inability to communicate.

The author continues … this is something that I hope goes viral and these parties involved get their names called out for this disgraceful and disheartening act against a child who has a disability and yet wouldn’t even be able to create a sin because he is one of the sweetest and most-innocent little boys someone would ever meet. A child, as close to utterly sinless as one can comprehend, is denied access to the Lord’s table. Suffer the little children … said Our Lord.

And our writer concludes … Please help spread the word for our son’s peers in his spectrum, so no other child or family has to deal with or feel what we have been made to feel over the past couple of days since we have been made aware of this, and he concludes

We believe our local parish priest and the decision-makers at the Archdiocese should be ashamed of themselves for this !

I don’t know the author … however I’m at once deeply saddened by his story yet proud to share it and hope that the clerical authorities learn from this. So what does this example show us.

We know that we are born in the image of God. We profess this every week. But what does it mean ? Image. When I shave, I see myself in the mirror. The image is reversed, but otherwise is the same. It’s me.

So if I see myself in the mirror, am I also looking at what God looks like ? After all … I’m made in His Image … so He must look like me … right ?

Well, if so, then Houston … we have a problem. Cos you see my neighbour is an ex-pat from China … and on the surface, he looks quite different to me. And when I see folk from other parts of the world, they too look different. In fact, even people from my own suburb don’t look the same as me … and for that, we say Thank You Lord. So this image bit must be very flexible. Or maybe it’s not about the physical aspect.

Maybe this image thing is not about the flesh’n’blood bit … but maybe it’s about the other two parts of the amalgam that makes up each one of us, for we are all an amalgam of spirit, soul and our current body.

Twice in each celebration of the Mass, as we priests cense the Altar, we pray … to God the Father, I dedicate spirit, soul, and bodies, reflecting the view that in a physical earthly sense, we will all have several lives, maybe many, and then we priests say the same to the Son and then to the Holy Spirit.

This is where we positively discriminate … identifying the three aspects of each of us, and yet also setting aside those two which are eternal, the soul and the spirit, the soul the essence of us, the spirit the essence of the Christ within.

In our daily lives, we need to see how discrimination affects us … how we internalise it … and we’re not just talking about race, but all aspects of our lives … gender and the supposed roles each play, religious views … mine’s holier than thine.

Yesterday, Vicki and I had the privilege of joining our friends from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association at the Mubarak Mosque here in Brisbane for a marvellous celebration of multi-faith engagement. Their motto … love for all, hatred for none. This shows us all … we can be better than we are.

In that, the Black Lives Matter movement is another good example and it’s not confined to any one nation … it’s a world-wide issue, cos it’s not just black in relation to white … or Muslim in relation to Christian … it’s anything that causes us to think less of someone else, or to diminish his rights as a human being, a child of God no less … all because he doesn’t look or sound the same as me.

As Steven Tyler of Aerosmith wrote in Living on the Edge … *if you can judge a wise man by the colour of his skin, then mister you’re a better man than I*.

We need to repair what we do when we know we shouldn’t,

how we think … when we know full-well we shouldn’t think like that.

We need to learn to discriminate … that’s for sure … but not based on earthly physical aspects, but rather discriminate based on the higher things … the underlying wisdom that comes from developing an understanding of the messages from Our Lord Christ.

And I think we can leave it there.