

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of the Year January 25th 2026

Fr Justin Driscoll

With the Australian Open in full swing and the Tamworth Country Music Festival on, we know that Australia Day can't be far away. One of the characteristics of a contemporary Australia Day is the very question as to whether it is a commemoration or a celebration, both or neither? We can be sure that there will be more debates over when this day should be and it's clear that we disagree about this and that it is a symptom of deeper issues that divide us. Any Australia Day worthy of the name will enable the many voices about this to be heard in respectful, safe and discerning environments that edge us towards truth, healing and reconciliation.

National days are helpful when they invite us to ask what we want our nation to be like and where our reality falls short. They can then allow us to celebrate the famous and unrecognised people who have helped shape the nation for good.

Our 2nd reading today from Paul to the Corinthians might help us find a way through this rather than either ignore the differences and pretend they're not there or polarise the debate even further with more entrenched binary positions. What Paul found in Corinth was a fractured Church, pleading allegiances to different leaders over and against Jesus. Paul teaches the Corinthians a critical lesson in being Church: we are all one under Jesus' leadership. Christ is the head of the Church. Within ancient and clear limits the Church has a wonderful diversity, a plurality of expression, spiritualities, rites, emphases and cultures. It's always been like this. It means the Church is taking seriously its role of finding Christ in every place and every community in the world. What the early Church had to learn is the same for us – to pray together, listen to each other and be open to the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit and celebrate our unity in diversity. That's what makes us Catholic and why today we need to listen again and very carefully, to Paul's admonition, 'I beg you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement

and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and purpose.'

This year, however, the murder of people attending a Jewish festival at Bondi has starkly reminded us that national unity cannot be assumed. It raises the same uncomfortable questions posed by Australia Day about unity and division in the Australian community. These questions reach beyond the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to ask instead what we, our communities, our politicians, our media and our institutions must do to address the forces that divide us and to strengthen those that bind us together. An Australia Day fit for purpose is one of many such needs.

The Bondi massacre points to fractures in Australian society. It also highlights the effects of the continuing war in Gaza on Jewish and Muslim communities in Australia.

Melbourne Jesuit priest Andy Hamilton writes this week that in the light of growing fractures and polarisation, Australia needs to strengthen institutions and processes that foster respect for persons, ensure personal safety, and embody equality before the law and fraternity in personal, political and international relationships.