

Relationships



On the weekend of September 10-11, I attended the Diocesan Licensed Lay Ministers' Conference at Grafton. I found it very stimulating and have decided to share a few thoughts that arose when I reflected on a question posed to us by our presenters, Bishop Stephen Pickard and Dr. Carlos Raimundo. The question is basic for all believers in God, *"What does it mean to be a person in the image of God?"* It arises from Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...'"

This was an extraordinary decision and then action by God. It definitely does not mean that we are gods. It firmly states in the first Commandment in Exodus 20:4, "I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me..You shall not make for yourself an idol". Also, Michael the Archangel, whose name translates as, "Who is like God?", supports our belief in only one God. In Revelation 12:7-12 Michael fought against Satan who challenged God's

identity.

When we examine who God really is, and what the word 'image' could mean in this context, we have a rich and wonderful description of human beings.

First, God's basic identity is love. We who have been given the gift of the image and likeness of God have received the ability to love, relate to others, reason, and have a conscience. Such attributes can be ignored, or developed and allowed to grow.

In the quotation from Genesis 1:26, God is spoken of as 'us'. This might sound strange but it can affirm our belief in a Trinitarian God of love, whose love develops through relationships with others. God is one, but comprises of 'Father' and 'Son' who are bound by love, which is the Holy Spirit continually being poured out from one to the other. Also, the words, 'Father' and 'Son' in this context do not mean God is male and only human males are in God's image. Rather, they can be understood as images of close relationships. God is actually the source of both men and women as well as every other gender and sexuality.

In the photograph on the front of this leaflet, you may be able to see on the right side, a Noisy Miner upside down feeding on the nectar of a yellow/orange Grevillea bloom. The bird is fed while helping to pollinate the flower. It is a small example of the relationships between all the members of God's creation.

Each person is not a trinity of persons, so we require relationships with others to reveal and grow in God's love. Our social life is important for the well-being of all. Being a person in God's image explains our close bond and relationship of belonging to God and one another, as well as our need to share ourselves and our love with others.

We are called to love all people and to care about them regardless of gender, race, age, disability, their behaviour or anything else. This means that we should not judge and condemn other people, but be open to accept and value them as fellow sisters and brothers.

Being in the image of the one loving God who created everyone and everything as unique, means that we can be enriched by relationships with others who see things from a different perspective and understanding from ourselves. For

example, other Christians may have differing interpretations of Bible passages from us, or contrasting views on what is morally right etc.. These are to be listened to, and perhaps learnt from and supported. This is not always easy. What is not acceptable is when differences cause us to create divisions among ourselves, and reject some of God's people.

Finally, our love and acceptance of all human beings must be extended to the rest of God's creation, animals, plants and earth. In Genesis 1:26, God also said about humankind, "...let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

We are to share God's love and care for the non-human part of creation. The world around us is an integral and beautiful part of our life. Many of us have enjoyed relationships with animals and birds, but we are not to dominate or selfishly use nature just for our benefit. Instead, we are to appreciate it and assist our world to continue to be habitable for all life, now and in the future.

God is not seen by us, but Jesus Christ was born, lived and died to show us how we are to love one another. We know that Jesus, like us, experienced pain, suffering and hardship as well as joy as a human being. He has also given us the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us in the expressing of the image of God in our lives and the world. This we need as we can often fail to love others as God loves them.

We, who are followers of Jesus, are called to develop our image of God individually, together in congregations as the body of Christ, and in other groups for the benefit of all. Each day, as people in the image of God, we have opportunities to share something of God's love in our relationships with God and all of God's creation, human and non-human. For this we give our grateful thanks to God.

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