

CHRISTMAS - A PLACE TO CALL HOME

This week the body of Nelson Mandela was returned to his homeland, providing a final resting place and homecoming for one of the world's most outstanding men.

This week in Perth, the Ashes found their way back home to Australia due to a brilliant Third Test win by our cricket team. Many of the players were in tears!

This week, our readings at morning Mass have been speaking of the coming of the Messiah as the coming of one who would lead us to our true homeland. In one gospel reading we read of Joseph taking Mary into his own home and making a place for her.

Homecoming is a word we often associate with Christmas as families gather, re-connect and celebrate. There's something warming about the thought of home-coming, something settling, something healing and wholesome.

This week the UNHCR published figures concerning the number of people who have been displaced by the current fighting in Syria. Their latest figure is something like 2.2 million people who've been driven from their homes for fear of their lives.

Last week a group of students and teachers from Marist Sisters College in Woolwich spent time in the Philippines with the Marist Sisters Mission there and encountered children living on an open playing field, hundreds and hundreds of them, with nowhere to call home.

Last week Holden announced that it will no longer be manufacturing vehicles in Australia after 2017. Perhaps the workers affected will not be rendered homeless, but their hard-learned skills may find it difficult to find a home and a place to develop.

Jesus' coming is meant to be a homecoming for all peoples. That is pretty clearly God's idea anyhow in sending his Son among us. We've had plenty of time to get used to the idea and yet poverty and homelessness seem to spiralling out of control everywhere we look.

In response, we can be paralysed by a sort of first-world guilt and throw lots of money at "the problem" whenever we are confronted by the inconvenience of people without homes or hope. We can just as easily turn a blind eye and distract ourselves with other issues, as we are wealthy enough to have the sorts of choices denied to the homeless and can find plenty to grab our attention in less confronting ways. We can retreat into a certain homecoming which closes doors behind it and the sounds of the hungry can fade from our minds.

Then again, we can just as easily celebrate our coming home this Christmas to a table with at least one spare place set there to welcome a stranger, someone who will not know the joy of homecoming at this time unless we show them how it's done.

Jesus' birth in a stable is no accident of birth! His birth reveals something of God's challenging humour. As we are all charmed by the thoughts of sheep, goats and cattle wandering the stable as Jesus is born, with a few hoary shepherds looking on, there's no way we'd think of letting any of them into our dining area! Jesus' birth story at once charms and confronts.

Jesus is born as one without a home. Let each one of us make some room for him at our table this Christmas time, one way or another. Between us all we can continue to make quite a difference to the shape of the homeless hearts around us and beyond us.

A blessed Christmas to you
Father Kevin