



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

AUSTRALIA DAY MESSAGE

Australia Day is marked in different ways by the different peoples who form the rich tapestry of this nation lying beneath the Southern Cross.

For some it is a moment to look back with pride on the many achievements of Australia since 26 January 1788. What began as a penal colony became in a relatively short time a peaceful and prosperous nation. It also became a stable democracy, sealed by Federation. None of this was easy, and Australia Day can be a time to give thanks for the sacrifices made.

For others who have come to this land more recently, often escaping the horrors of war, persecution and poverty, it is a moment to give thanks for the new home they have found in this country where they have been able to recover hope and rebuild their lives. Australia has given them much, but they too have given Australia much; and for that we all give thanks on the national day.

For the first inhabitants of the land Australia Day looks different. We cannot forget the injustice and dispossession they have known since 1788. Often they were displaced from their land; and Australia has slowly come to understand that to break the bond between Aboriginal peoples and the land was to do them great violence, communally and individually. The cornerstone of Aboriginal cultures was shaken, with devastating consequences for Aboriginal peoples' sense of identity. This was made worse when children were removed from their families. To this day, we see the effects of this, described at times as intergenerational trauma.

We who are not culpable are nonetheless responsible to do what we can to heal the wounds of injustice, since until those wounds are healed the claim that "all are equal" in this land will be little more than empty words. From 1788 until now, all have not been equal here; and they never will be until we remember in a way that reckons truthfully with the past and commits to doing what is necessary to heal the wounds. Until they are healed our national potential will never be fully realised, and Australia Day will not be the time of shared celebration it is meant to be.

A national day can be for us all a moment of deeper reflection when we recognise that Australia, with its many peoples, is capable of great compassion and of a wisdom that understands the truth. It can be a day to recognise what this country can be, a land where all are in fact equal and can walk together into the future God is preparing.

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God of all peoples, Lord of the journey
who always walk with us,
in this land you have blessed us
with the first inhabitants of the land
who have loved it through the ages:
for them we give you thanks.
You have blessed us in the settlers
who made this land their home,
and forged a nation with their toil:
for them we give you thanks.
You have blessed us in the many peoples
of different languages and cultures
who have found a new home here:
for them we give you thanks.
We ask that you make a home among us,
so that justice and truth may flourish here
and all Australians may walk together
into the future you are preparing:
for that we give you thanks.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

+ Mark Coleridge
Archbishop of Brisbane