

Reflection

given by School Principal
Mrs Patricia Hales



The Gospel reading was especially chosen for today's Liturgy, leading to the opening of the Yalawa Aboriginal Education Centre. It draws an analogy, between water and Jesus Christ as the source of life, and reminds us, that we cannot be a source of life, unless we are willing to draw from the water – to be people of invitation, encounter and witness. At the commencement of the liturgy, water was placed in our sacred space. This water was lovingly collected, from surrounding country, by Mrs Melonie Hawke, a proud Worimi woman. It was collected from country where you - our students and families live, as a vibrant, life giving connection to your land and identity.

We witnessed each individual container of water poured into one vessel. Just as Jesus Christ is the living water in our Christian lives, the water from country is the lifeblood of communities; it comes from one source, and returns to one source. Yet, as it flows across a variety of different lands – the lands from which the great ancestor spirits rose, it provokes an invitation to all of us, to draw together; to be one people, but at the same time, to be people who recognise diversity and appreciate the inextricable connection, of the Australian Aboriginal people to the land.

The blessing with water, reminded us, that water to Aboriginal people is a sign of fulfilment and peace; as Christians, we know that the water of baptism brings us to encounter. To encounter, is to bless – it is a gift, a state of grace, it invokes a call to acceptance and humble service. Encounter is living what you proclaim – it requires integrity and moral purpose. As a school that proudly claims to have the largest number of Indigenous students of any secondary school in the Diocese, our encounter and respect must be real and lived.

The opening of the Yalawa Centre, bears witness to invitation and encounter. It is a physical step towards recognising that our Aboriginal students and families – our first nation people, are the lifeblood, the living water, of the future of this nation. This is a concept that we must all embrace. The establishment of the Yalawa Centre, recognises, that as a nation, our identity and character can be strengthened by a respectful appreciation of the various expressions of Indigenous education and culture. As we celebrate, value and take pride in our Indigenous people and culture, we affirm our commitment to the process of supporting and strengthening our Indigenous students' sense of value. Genuinely seeking to understand Indigenous culture, can also help to dispel stereotypes and myths about Indigenous people, that result from a misunderstanding which serves to perpetuate the disadvantage and discrimination that has very sadly been experienced by the majority of Aboriginal people in this country.

As individuals, there is much we can learn from Indigenous culture. If we open ourselves to humbly learn about a different worldview, we can grow in our understanding of ourselves and be enriched by another way of thinking about the world. In this way, together, we become the living water.

The future success of the Yalawa Centre will be dependent on a strong partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, parents and educators, who recognise that change is not only important, but essential for growth, health and equity. Tom Calma who was an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner in 2008, said that “education should captivate and inspire; it should be delivered in a way that captures the hearts and minds of all students – including indigenous students.” That is the aspiration we have for all of our young people, and if we aspire to this we must inspire and deliver! The well must never be too deep.

The establishment of the Yalawa Centre is a physical sign that we at St Joseph’s need to commit to change – we need to be fully invitational. The existence of this centre is an opportunity to promote a strength-based approach that we all will encourage, adopt and actively participate in, honouring differences and searching for common understanding. It requires us to be task focused about building a vision and a plan that will make a real difference for our Indigenous students and indeed the whole St Joseph’s Lochinvar community. Today’s opening is a sign of our collective commitment to action; a sign of our willingness to follow Jesus’ model and become a spring of water, that witnesses life and hope for the future.