

TRINITY SUNDAY 2015 B

FORMER NATIONAL CHIEF SHAWN ATLEO speaks about the victims: “There is real learning happening in Canada right now through the work of the truth and reconciliation commission, sparked by the settlement agreement and the powerful stories of survivors. And I might add, the incredible energy, enthusiasm and engagement of young people, knowing that they got aunts, uncles, grandparents, great grandparents and those who have gone on, that suffered through the incredible difficult chapter in our shared history. What they’re saying is we must transform, transform for our own families. The survivors are saying we need to recognize that, yes, we were victimized, even those who came in the generations after, were part of the cycle of trauma and these difficulties and social ills still prevail, they are still a reality in our community, but we can say that it’s this time in our history that we can remove ourselves from being only described as victims, to be recognized as strong survivors because that’s what we are, resilience in the face, having overcome incredible odds to accomplish the things we are seeing in our communities.” Unquote

I hear him saying that choice is still there, to choose to create conditions to reclaim indigenous identity. The move from victim to survivor is done through the difficult path of forgiveness. Today we pray for First Nations, Inuit and Métis for the courage to choose forgiveness. “Forgiveness is the final form of love.”

Reinhold Niebuhr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.” In fact it is a process; it's not a one-shot deal. It's a daily and lifelong practice to move through layers and layers of hurt and grief and re-open the heart to compassion and kindness. Gandhi has said, “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

We see that miracle happening in many elders today. Just a few weeks ago I heard an elder in Edmonton circle speak of his rebirth through forgiveness of the pain he endured in Residential Schools. Young man Omar Kadar. His witness puts flesh on Mark Twain’s beautiful expression: “Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet leaves on the heel of the one who has crushed it.”

Truth and Reconciliation: Often we contemporary non-aboriginals have difficulty accepting the truth of our sin. Why? Because I was not there. How can I assume the blame for actions that are not mine? Many of those who were part of the Residential School system feel unjustly judged because they dedicated themselves and worked seven days a week to serve the children in their care. The Anglican Primate expressed it this way: **“Though individual participants may have had nobler intentions, the underlying colonial aim was to break Indigenous cultures, and to assimilate the children into the bottom rung of a hierarchical society.”** The system was oppressive and destructive.

TRUTH: We have disrespected First Nations with our prejudices and racism and still do. Truth: We often intentionally do evil. But perhaps just as often we do things that are evil without full intention or will, because we are immersed in an oppressive system. These things cause pain to others, and we remain with shame and guilt. St. Peter addresses the people and says; “You killed the author of life.” Speaking of Jesus Christ, but, “I know you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers.” Did he say, “Therefore there is no problem.”? NO! He goes on to say you must repent; “Repent,

therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.” So Peter speaks of sin that is done without our full will. These evil acts of ours whether done intentionally or unintentionally, as well as sins of omission, failing to do the good, need the healing forgiveness of the Creator and the forgiveness of First Nations. Today we pray that we non-aboriginals own the truth of the injury caused by ourselves and by the unjust system of a dominant colonial society that continues today. Let us own our sin and repent!

Sean Atleo speaks to the non-aboriginal, **“You as well are a treaty person** irrespective of where you reside and if you are not of indigenous heritage know that **you have also inherited this legacy**, this history and you can also play a part in reconciliation... That first step is just being taken now.”

Just a word about this feast of the Trinity that we celebrate today. Words to speak of the Divine. How do we speak of our experience of the Divine? So how do we understand the Trinity? We don't! God, by definition, is beyond conceptualization, beyond imagination, beyond language. **The Christian belief that God is a trinity helps underscore how rich the mystery of God is and how our experience of God is always richer than our concepts and language about God.**

Although the dogma of the Trinity was officially formulated in the fourth century, no formula can ever capture the reality of God. Polytheism rightly sensed the divine hidden under every rock.

To what does this call us?

To humility. All of us need to be more humble in our language about God. **The concept of God needs to stretch, not shrink, the human imagination.** Often in the past in our relationship with First Nations People, we were too quick to dismiss their spirituality and label it as error. Christians had the correct and only language to speak of God. Our education system in the arts, science and even theology was offered as the only correct vision of mankind, the world and the divine. We taught religion but failed to recognize spirituality.

Tomorrow we have a ceremonial walk of reconciliation. A significant step on this journey toward reconciliation could come from a deeper awareness of the richness of First Nations Spirituality. Today we recognize that we Christians may have had a rich revelation of the essence of God through the doctrine of the Trinity, but the interpretation of scripture and our image of the Divine put God in the heavens, and humans as those ordained to dominate and master all other life, with the privilege to exploit and extract the resources and minerals for our consumption. Our property. Colonial culture was the lens through which we read scripture. We paint ourselves antagonistic toward Mother Earth. Those who are reflective today, recognize that the vision of the Divine as Creator God, the Great Spirit and the deeply held experience of interconnectness of all creation proclaims a gospel the world needs to hear today. Respecting native spirituality, we can claim a renewed vision for our world. This can be a lived Reconciliation based on Respect. Mike Cachagee, an elder who spoke last night at the Kairos event, expressed this when he said “Reconciliation is working together for a good cause to arrive at a good life.”

We are created in the image of God who is one. Sr. Priscilla Solomon said it well: “We have failed to respect each other and the land. That old fabric of life must go. We must take apart the threads of colonization and create a new cloth of right relationships among brothers and sisters, making this land truly home for us all.”

All my relations!