

JPIC 88 – JULY 2019

Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit..[Rule of Saint Albert]  
Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian .. [Regula Sto Alberto]

## GOD'S GRACE SHINES IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY

(a reflection by Sr Dorothea and Sisters, OCD Carmelite Monastery, Christchurch, New Zealand)

This incident took place not long after the terrorist shooting attack in two Christchurch Mosques in New Zealand killing 50 men, women and children, and wounding many. The immense sorrow in this city expressed itself in many ways. As Carmelite Sisters dedicated to prayer, especially for peace in the world, we too felt the tragedy keenly, as these people were all at prayer when they were slaughtered without mercy. We wanted to get a message of sympathy and support to the bereaved survivors...the following was God's wonderful way of allowing us to do just that!

On Thursday 4 April, Sr Marietta, Sr Mareta and myself needed to go out to get passport photos at a place in Addington as we have to keep them updated for identity purposes. All were due to expire this year and I decided to go with them at the last minute as it would save another trip out later. One Sister had another appointment over Riccarton way at 5.20pm. Our good friend, Joy, picked the 3 of us up at 4.00pm. Whenever there is a need to leave our monastery enclosure we go only for that reason and back home again. The following was indeed an unexpected 'exceptional exception' to this, which we judged to be justified at the time due to the gravity of recent events in Christchurch.

After we got our photos, we drove across to Riccarton via Hagley Park. Suddenly we realised we were quite close to the fated Mosque where horrendously, over 50 people were killed and as many injured while they were at prayer. The gold dome came into view. All the news we had heard and seen crashed in on us as we looked at that dome very differently as never before. Joy asked us if we would like to drive past. As we got closer, we could see the thousands of flower bouquets on the footpath outside, which we had seen in photos. Armed police with huge rifles standing guard came into view. Then a second further along. Joy then asked if we would like to get out and have a look at the bouquets. We did. By this

time we were at the gates to the short driveway and we could see people at the doorway of the Mosque. The Muslim man who leads prayers at the Mosque, the Imam, saw us from the doorway and came down to greet us. We felt really drawn to go with his warm invitation to come in, hardly believing what was happening! There was a sense of something wonderful to be able to pay our respects, and personally express our love and concern. What an extremely rare privilege for us to be there!! And not planned at all.



At the door, we were hailed by a welcoming group of people – Muslim men and women who warmly embraced us as we gave a quick explanation of who we were. We all gelled straight away. Courteously, we were asked to remove our shoes at the door, like Moses, which we did. They had a head scarf for Joy and for some other women there. Some of the men then asked us if we wanted a drink or anything? We asked for some water. This was promptly brought to us in seconds – bottles of water for us all.

It was such a warm atmosphere. We told them that we had very much wanted to write a sympathy letter but couldn't find their address! But here we were to do that - in person - on the way to an appointment! Only God could have possibly arranged all those little details for this to happen.

We were overcome to think we would soon be standing in the very place of such terror and bloodshed, which we had followed closely and prayed so much about. We also watched by link the moving Hagley Park Memorial Service with PM Jacinda Ahern and Cat Stevens (a thrill from my old days) - and thousands of people gathered to grieve together and support relatives and friends of the victims.

People crowded around us. It was peaceful and joyful. There were some lovely women too who we so enjoyed talking with us and vice versa. A young lady poignantly told us that her husband was killed and she was 3 months pregnant. Others spoke of accepting everything and talked of forgiveness etc. Their quiet serenity spoke volumes. By this time we had entered the prayer room of the Mosque. Tension and horror rose inside me.



A very tense moment. No words could describe what had happened there. The

whole floor had been cleaned of the rivers of blood, bullet ridden walls plastered and painted (all by volunteers) as fast as they could. Quite large and bare, but homely, and only a gray, but warm lining on the floor before it would be re carpeted properly. The podium was in place at the front for a speaker, behind which one man hid, saving his life. This reminded us that the bus load of a visiting Bangladesh cricket team were impatient to arrive in time for the sermon that day to be preached from that podium. But they had several annoying hold-ups of a minute here

and there along the way, which saved their lives. They arrived to see the most horrifying scenes unfold before their eyes outside as people stumbled, bleeding profusely, onto the footpath.

As we moved further inside this room, still surrounded by smiling, peaceful



people, I felt my tears running down with deepest sorrow and the shock of actually standing in this place. I thought I was dreaming! But realised I wasn't when I couldn't find my handkerchief!!! Oh no! How awful! The smiling, kindly prayer leader - in his white robes and Muslim cap actually noticed. He hastened over and sat me down on a white plastic chair. Kneeling in front of me, he gently wiped my eyes with snowy white tissues. Then he carefully dried my face and asked me anxiously if I was okay. I was thinking is this really happening?? A Muslim man drying my tears. And we were there to comfort them!! It was the most tender, beautiful and unexpected gesture. I was dumbfounded and humbled and felt so silly that I'd forgotten my hanky. I thanked him profusely.

Only a great and humorous God could have *possibly* engineered such a thing - getting us there and allowing us to experience such a warm hearted reception!!! You can imagine us telling the Sisters later!!!! It was soooo funny and I don't think I'll ever live it down!!

It was now about 5.00 pm which signalled their prayer time. About 7 men along with my solicitous 'carer' stood facing the front of the prayer room. Then the Imam began the haunting prayer chant which filled the room. Another friendly lady beside us, that we had just met and was a Muslim convert, translated the beautiful prayers for us.

We were watching the clock having to be at the next place at 5.20 pm and aware of the traffic! It was quite late for an appointment which again was another extraordinary co-incidence that allowed us all that time at the Mosque! But that wasn't all...

We said good goodbye and walked down the short passage to the outside drive where more things were in store. There were some people there – a man and a woman and a few others with large cameras who asked if they could interview and film us. We asked what it was for etc and it turned out they were a Reuter’s news team. That was overseas stuff so we complied – hoping it would all be ‘off shore’. Joy stood at our side as the interviewer directed, and they asked questions as we tried to think straight. We were still feeling dazed after such an emotional experience in the Mosque - to say the least...However they said our answers were

perfect which seemed like another little miracle in the circumstances. I remember saying that we may have different beliefs but we were, bottom line, united in our humanity and that was **the** most important thing.



So ended an amazing afternoon which was a complete surprise and totally unplanned. Someone far greater than us had already worked out all the details of an event that will be the highlight of our lives for years to come!



**NAIDOC WEEK** celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate, not only in Indigenous communities, but by Australians from all walks of life, the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Indigenous communities.

<https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/naidoc-week>

### **FOR YOUR CALENDAR**

**7<sup>th</sup> July – Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Sunday  
BEGINNING OF NAIDOC WEEK**

7<sup>th</sup> July - 1945 Blessed Peter To Rot martyred in Papua New Guinea

12<sup>th</sup> July – 1971 Aboriginal Flag first flown in Adelaide

14<sup>th</sup> July- Apostleship of the Sea Sunday

16<sup>th</sup> July – 1945: Detonation of the first atomic bomb, New Mexico USA

18<sup>th</sup> July – Nelson Mandela International Day 1918 Birthday

26<sup>th</sup> July – 1833: Approval of emancipation Bill, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire

28<sup>th</sup> July – National Tree Day

30<sup>th</sup> July – World Day against Trafficking in Persons

**PLASTIC FREE JULY 2019 - HELPFUL HINTS & ACTIVITIES ...** <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>

### **Reconciliation Prayer**

Holy (Father), God of Love, You are the Creator of this land and all good things  
We acknowledge the pain and shame of our history and the suffering of our peoples.  
And we ask your forgiveness.

We thank you for the survival of Indigenous cultures

Our hope is in you because you gave your son Jesus to reconcile the world to you.

We pray for your strength and grace to forgive, accept and love one another,  
as you love us and forgive and accept us, In the sacrifice of your Son.

Give us the courage to accept the realities of our history So that we may build a better future for our nation.

Teach us to respect all cultures. Teach us to care for our land and waters.

Help us to share justly the resources of this land.

Help us to bring about spiritual and social change; to improve the quality of life for all groups in our communities, especially the disadvantaged.

Help our young people to find true dignity and self-esteem by your Spirit

May your power and love be the foundations

on which we build our families, our communities and our Nation.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**