

Witness to hope



Peace plan: The Dalai Lama in St Stephen's Cathedral on June 11.

By Paul Dobbyn, The Catholic Leader, 12 June 2015

THE Dalai Lama, during an historic talk in Brisbane's St Stephen's Cathedral yesterday (June 11), gave an amusing impression of shivering in the cold as he visited St Francis' birthplace in Assisi.

"It was so cold there," the slightly stooped 79-year-old said, wrapping his yellow monk's cloak around himself to the delight of the packed gathering, "so cold".

Tibet's exiled spiritual leader delivered the impression as he related his connection to "the Polish pope" St John Paul II and his visit to the Italian town for the World Day of Prayer for Peace held there in 1986.

He was part of a Multifaith Service for World Peace with representatives of many of the world's major religions – Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Bahai.

Also present were some of the state's political and civic leaders including Queensland Governor Paul de Jersey.

The Dalai Lama arrived after attending the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre where he addressed and delivered teachings to members of the Tibetan, Bhutanese and Mongolian communities resident in Brisbane.

The spiritual leader's arrival at the cathedral drew a mixed response in Elizabeth Street with ecstatic supporters dancing joyfully, while another group, the International Shugden Community, chanted angrily and waved placards denouncing him.

Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge welcomed the Dalai Lama to the cathedral calling him a "witness to hope".

“I greet you not as a stranger to this city or to this cathedral but beyond all the politics and all the protests, I welcome you as a fellow pilgrim and even as a friend. Peace be with you,” he said.

The Dalai Lama stood and gazed up briefly at St Stephen’s crucifix on his way to addressing the gathering.

“Respected leaders of different spiritual traditions, brothers and sisters... actually, we are all born the same way so then finally we all die (the) same way,” the Dalai Lama said.

“So we (are) all truly human brothers and sisters. It’s a great honour that you welcome me here in this holy place.

“It seems too that almost all the world’s major spiritual traditions are gathered here ... one of my own commitments is to promote religious harmony.

“Pope John Paul II, the Polish pope, invited me to the great inter-religious gathering he convened in Assisi.

“As we understood then, harmony among our different religious traditions is important because each one of them is a living source of love, tolerance and forgiveness.

“They may have differing philosophical points of view, but they all convey a message of love and compassion.”

The Dalai Lama encouraged the congregation to build from within to create themselves as “happy individuals” and to then build outwards towards their communities.

He spoke on the fundamental purpose of all religious traditions to “encourage the growth of love” and the importance of trust “which comes from showing each other sincere affection”.

Associate Professor Mohamad Abdalla, the director of Islamic Studies at Griffith University and an imam at Kuraby Mosque delivered a response to the Dalai Lama’s address.

“I am humbled to respond to your wonderful words about the importance of compassion love and forgiveness,” he said.

“There is no doubt in my mind that we must develop trust so that friendship is developed.

“It is not our faith traditions which fail us but it is we who fail our faith traditions.

“Hopefully, we are able to overcome the prejudices that are in our past and we are able to work collectively as part of the human race that works for the betterment of humanity.”

Archbishop Coleridge referred to the Dalai Lama as “a remarkable spiritual presence, thrust into a political maelstrom, born of a particular culture, yet able to speak across cultures”.

“You are someone who has known sorrow yet can speak of happiness,” he said.

“For long years Your Holiness, you have been witness to a deepening human hope and that hope is always mysterious – it comes from somewhere else; it comes from beyond.”

Archbishop Coleridge said “in speaking of this witness to hope I’m reminded of Pope John Paul the Second now saint ... with whom Your Holiness met a number of times and with whom you seem to have an affinity.

“The best known biography of him is titled Witness to Hope – it records he suffered under totalitarian regimes in a way that should have destroyed him as it did so many others.

“But this suffering didn’t destroy him; it created him; it made him the radiant human being, the unforgettable witness to hope he became.

“You too, Your Holiness, have suffered many things that should have destroyed but they have not.

“Following the path of Buddha, arduous and finally enlightened, you have found a way beyond all that destroys; beyond violence to peace; beyond aggression to freedom beyond to cruelty to compassion.

“And that’s why we welcome you today as a witness to hope.”

To conclude the service, representatives from some of the world’s different faiths led the congregation in prayer.

The representatives were: Dr Janet Khan, national spiritual assembly of the Bahais in Australia, three representatives from Sri Lanka’s Theravada Buddhist Tradition, Surendra Prasad OAM from Hindu Council of Australia, the president of Queensland’s Jewish community Ariel Heber, Venerable Chueh Shan from the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple, Kuraby mosque imam Mohamad Abdalla, director of the Sikh Nishkam Society of Australia Ranjit Singh and Brisbane’s Anglican Archbishop, Dr Phillip Aspinall.

The Dalai Lama’s visit to St Stephen’s Cathedral coincided with a 12-day Australian tour which started in Sydney on June 3.

Tenzin Gyatso is the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet.

Following his trip to Brisbane, he was to head to Uluru for the first time before finishing his tour in Perth.

The Dalai Lama last came to Queensland in 2011 where he met more than 1000 people from flood-affected communities.