



“Mi Spiace” – “I am sorry”

May we listen deeply, apologize sincerely, and pray for God’s healing presence.

By Bishop Kathy

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These words – “mi spiace” – “I am sorry”, were finally said by Pope Francis on April 1st, 2022 to a crowd gathered in the ornate Clementine Hall in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City. There were Métis, Inuit and First Nations community members, as well as, plenty of bishops and other clergy gathered in that space.

Some of the people came with hopes, dreams and expectations they anticipated would be fulfilled. Some came with lines drawn in the sand of their hearts, doubting they would receive what they needed in order to have peace or continue on in life in a healing way. Many of those people were also enveloped in deep sadness for the parents, brothers, sisters and friends who, like my second mom Jean, had died before they were able to hear the words they spent much of their lives longing for and expecting to soon hear.

From all accounts it was a deeply moving gathering, alternating between sorrow and joy. There was sharing of gifts both tangible and intangible. It was beautiful to see indigenous people seen and welcomed in the fullness of their identity, wearing their culture with pride in that ancient space.

When the meeting with the Pope came to an end and the media descended on the gathering, we heard some say the Pope did not go far enough with his apology. Still others, that he did not completely address what happened in residential schools. But there was one woman, interviewed by the CBC, who said she thought she would never hear those words in her lifetime, and that hearing them touched her to the core of her being. That although she knew there was much work still to do on the journey of reconciliation; she now wanted to let it begin both in and through her.

As she spoke I was reminded of the haunting question my mom Jean had asked me about her residential school experience not long after I became a pastor. In a voice with the innocence and bewilderment of a child, “Kathleen, how could they do that to us, be so mean, we were just kids, we were just little kids,” and then she wept. I had no answer, no way to justify what she endured at the hands of people who felt they were doing something ‘good’ in God’s Name. It is a mystery and miracle to me that her faith and trust in Jesus remained.

Hearing Pope Francis, watching all the various reactions, I wondered what makes each of us hear and accept things so very differently. Is it our history, our lived experience, our faith stance, our education, our stage of life, or our personality type? Or is it more straightforward than any of those things. Could it simply be an abiding hope that comes because we are intimately connected to the Creator and trust that in the words of Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.”

I did not write this article expecting to answer the questions of how it is humans react to the seeking and/or receiving of forgiveness. Nor am I qualified to propose the journey forward for any one. Instead, I write to encourage us to look at not only the journey of reconciliation that our indigenous siblings have and continue to be on, but also to encourage us to look at those places where we might need to say those words, “mi spiace”, or hear those words, “I’m sorry” so that life and reconciliation can begin anew.

May we be as bold, brave and loving as the survivors of residential schools and their families. May we openly name injustice, even when doing so implicates ourselves and our ancestors. May we listen deeply, apologize sincerely, and pray for God’s healing presence. “I’m sorry,” “mi spiace”, a few short words and reconciliation begins.