



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

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Waitangi Homily 6 February 2026

Ko Aoraki te maunga

Ko Hokitika te awa

Ko Stephen Lowe ahau

Our pepeha identifies and connects us to the tupuna, the ancestors, that are our mountain, our river, our iwi ... In doing so it not only grounds and identifies us, but it also opens us to the possibility to connect ourselves to others and to God.

In the same way the whenua that is Waitangi, this Treaty ground, has its own wairua, its own spirit, capable of being able to ground and connect all of us in Aotearoa New Zealand.

For there is something deeply spiritual about Waitangi that invites us to walk gently here, as we remember the events of this day in 1840.

At the burning bush God said to Moses, “Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground” – From that moment of encounter, starts a journey, a hikoi for Moses and the people of Israel.

From this whenua tapu, this holy ground, and the moment of encounter, the signing, the hikoi of our journey together as a nation begins. Despite all the contradictions and conflicts that followed this place witnesses to the hope and possibility of a new dynamic, mutual relationship.

So, to return to this whenua asks us to be humble.

Here we are called to put aside our agendas and listen again, reawakening the hopes and possibilities, discovering anew who we are – tangata whenua and tangata o te Tiriti, who strive to embrace the wairua of Waitangi today.

On this day in 1840, my tupuna, Jean-Baptiste Pompallier stood on this whenua. He was the first Catholic Bishop in New Zealand, the first Bishop of Auckland.

On this day in 1840, he asked - that religion should not be interfered with that ‘free toleration’ would be allowed in ‘matters of faith.’ He asked that a public guarantee to this effect, be given to Māori, to which Hobson agreed.

The statement of Williams and Colenso was read... “the Governor says the several faiths of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome, and also the Māori custom, shall be alike protected.”

He didn't stay for the signing... He had already been meeting with rangatira... he had joined their korero – they listened, they spoke about the pros and cons of te Tiriti. The decision whether to sign or not was theirs.

186 years later I am humbled to stand here, wearing Pompallier's cross ...

Consider for a moment the signing of the Treaty in the light of the cross...

For the cross of Jesus witnesses to betrayal - of being sold out for 30 silver pieces.

It embodies denial and abandonment because of fear or self-interest.

The cross and its crown of thorns, witnesses to the mental anguish from when all that is loved is stripped away by authorities and powers.

The cross is a testimony of the suffering of Him and those who were stripped of all they loved and who are hung up to die.

The cross casts the shadow of punishment and death.

But at the same time te rīpeka o te Karaiti, the cross of the Christ speak of so much more of what is the underlying ground of Te Tiriti...

For the cross speaks of relationship...

It speaks of self-giving love – the first call of every relationship, to mutual self-giving love for the good of the other.

The cross speaks of the dignity, the value, the mana of every person and the commitment we need to hope and love, even when all seems lost.

The cross speaks of the triumph of life over death, of love over hate.

It speaks of covenant, of a sacred relationship and a desire for a reconciliation that enables, whanaunatanga, right relationship so that we may become one.

Finally, the cross speaks of a history that was, a present that is, and a future of what might be.

Jesus prayed for that future for his disciples in the Gospel reading but his prayer is true for us... *Father, may they all be one. May they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me.*

So we approach the cross with reverence as a taonga, a sign of a covenant of love...

So too we are invited to approach with reverence the taonga of the Treaty so it too may point us forward on the paths of peace and unity.

We approach the Treaty as we would enter the wharenui – we take off our shoes because recognise we are in the presence of the sacred. In the same way we become humble as we enter the Treaty for it too is our tupuna.

As with all our tupuna te Tiriti comes with its history – its own whakapapa of people who were its signatories, its crafters and the spectators of that day.

It was never perfect and it never will be perfect, but nonetheless it embodies the hopes and possibilities of the peoples of a different time with their differing challenges, needs, issues or agendas, hopes and dreams. From today we approach Te Tiriti and the events of 1840 as our tupuna, our ancestor.

For mana whenua and tangata whenua, it is your tupuna, whether your own tupuna signed or did not... for the decision to sign or not signing is in itself a sign of the complexity and concerns of the issues that were the subject of korero and hui across the motu.

For you ministers of the Crown it is your tupuna too. You are descendants of a Treaty partner who historically did not honour it but who also know the complexity and concerns of the issues that are the still and must be the subject of korero and hui across the motu.

For us ministers of religion it is our tupuna as we whakapapa back to those who first journeyed with Māori, who knew their aspirations and concerns, and who were given the task to help craft and translate the Treaty.

For all of us here, and for all in this land the Treaty is also our tupuna, for we were represented in the spectators that gathered that day. Today we as Pakeha are te tangata o te Tiriti, the people of te Tiriti, here because of what was signed in a spirit of hope and possibility here in 1840.

We know those hopes and possibilities didn't come to pass. We have seen in the last 186 years how distorting history and labelling people imprisoned them, how it can continue to imprison our attitudes and relationships so imprisoning the potentiality of what we might do together and become together in our future.

The cross and te wairua o te Tiriti, the spirit of the Treaty calls us away from this. They call us to a justice that is reconciling and restorative, to a right way of thinking and loving, and towards a life giving way of speaking and acting.

We do this first by taking off our shoes and being humble and I invite you to join me in doing that now.

With humility we come back to our tupuna of the Treaty and this whenua tapu. From this place of humility may we recommit ourselves to discovering the story of our peoples and our journey as a nation, and as we rediscover the richness of each other may goodness flourish as we take up anew the hikoi that advances us together of hopes and possibilities so that we become one people, tangata whenua and tangata o te Tiriti together who in the bonds of love we meet.