

MOLOMOLOMUIVA'E: FOOTPRINTS TO FOLLOW

Molomolomuiva'e is the Tongan for "Stepping on or following the footprints". I went to visit my family in Dunedin during the Christmas holidays. While I was there, I usually went to St Kilda beach with my wife and our two daughters. As we arrived at the beach, we could see many footprints of different sizes and shapes and they faced different directions. It immediately prompted me to think of two things. Firstly, the importance of footprints and secondly, following. In looking at many footprints, I asked myself a familiar question, "Whose footprints should I follow?" Although footprints and following are two different aspects, yet they are inseparable. One is linked to the other. Without footprints it is hard to follow or to find direction. Similarly, it is hard to follow when there are so many footprints and especially when they are scattered in different directions.

As I continue to watch the footprints on the sand, I started to think about the importance of sand to the island nations of the Pacific and the issue of global warming. Global warming of course has a major impact already in some of our low-lying nations in the Pacific region. Some have already lost their sand and their soil are continuing to erode to the ocean. Because their soil is eroded, it affects their livelihood for they are depending on soil for agriculture. *Caritas Oceania* magazine reports on that matter by stating, "King tides continue to affect small islands round Papua New Guinea, but the experience of Nawi village in Fiji shows coastal impacts on large islands too. Coastal sand mining in Solosolo, Samoa has destroyed a beach and forced relocation of residents. The low-lying Popua community in Tonga faces frequent flooding during king tides and storms, but some residents are able to keep themselves above water. The small coastal community of Mitimiti in Aotearoa New Zealand is planting sand dunes and taking a flexible approach to possible future relocation of buildings." (p. 17) This report reflects on the reality of global warming and climate change although some scientists and some world leaders are in denial of this fact. Whose footprints shall we follow? We have so many footprints and we don't know which one to follow.

We have a duty for the future generations and the kind of footprints we leave behind is a legacy which will determine their future in terms of climate change. Some of you might have seen or heard about the poem *Footprints in the sand* and its emphasis. The poem was about a person who had a dream that he was walking along the beach with the Lord. While they were walking, this person noticed that sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only. He complained to the Lord saying, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?" The Lord replied, "The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you."

The image of footprints in this poem reflects care, love, and compassion. It's really portraying an image of a mother's womb (*fonua/ whenua*) where a child is carried, nurtured, and cared for months before he/she is born. This is the attitude that we must all have and call upon the powerful nations in the world and their leaders to attain in order to sustain our land (*fonua/ fanua/ vanua/ whenua*) where we live and nurturing us and our families.

As we approach the Lent Season, we are invited to follow (*molomolomuiva'e*) the footprints of Jesus as we are thinking of the issue of global warming and climate change. This is the invitation of Isaiah 58:1-12, one of the Bible readings for Ash Wednesday. Isaiah challenged the leadership of Israel at the time of their blindness by worshipping God with their mouths but don't follow God's justice and righteousness. God doesn't demand fasting but rather justice upon the workers, the hungry, the naked, the homeless, and the affliction. This is the kind of fasting that the low-lying nations of the Pacific want from the powerful nations of the world in terms of the issue of global warming. Jesus had similar compassion, "bring good news to the poor...proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18) The invitation that if we follow Jesus, he will make us to live out his compassion, his peace, his love, his justice, and his care for our environment, the world, our home. This is the longing of the composer of Hymn WOV 514 and in the last verse he writes, "Lord, let me see your footmarks and in them plant my own; that I may follow boldly, and in your strength alone; O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end; and then in heaven receive me, my Saviour and my friend." Do we know whose footprints we follow (*molomolomuiva'e*)?

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