Homily by Bishop Anthony Randazzo
Bishop of Broken Bay

Red Wednesday 2025
Our Lady of Dolours Church, Chatswood
19 November 2025

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today we gather for Red Wednesday, a day when the Church across the world pauses to remember, to pray for, and to stand in solidarity with Christians who suffer for their faith. It is a day for prayer, but it is also a day for courage. Together, we raise our voices to say to the world that religious persecution is intolerable. It is violent. It destroys lives, families, communities, and nations.

The freedom to practise the faith, to worship God with integrity and without fear, whether as individuals or as communities, is a fundamental human right. As people of faith, we call upon the leaders of nations to stand together, to uphold human dignity, and to defend this right wherever and whenever it is threatened.

Today in particular, we ask that Christians throughout the world be afforded the freedom to live their faith without fear. Although persecution of Christians occurs across every continent, today I would like to draw our attention to somewhere quite close to home. We do not need to travel far beyond our own region to find suffering and courage intertwined in the life of the Church.

One very real and heartbreaking example comes from Myanmar, one of Australia's closest neighbours. In February of this year, a Catholic priest named Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win was brutally murdered in the village of Kangyi Taw in Myanmar.

The details of his final moments have been recounted by two women who witnessed the attack. Their testimony reveals not only the cruelty of persecution, but also the extraordinary faith and calm courage of a priest who would not deny his Lord.

On that day, Father Donald encountered ten armed militiamen who were, according to the witnesses, clearly intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. They ordered him to kneel before them. He responded with a calm conviction: "I only kneel before God."

With remarkable composure, he even asked them, "What can I do for you? Is there something we can talk about?" There was no anger in him. No fear. Only the integrity of a man configured to Jesus Christ.

But violence, when fuelled by hatred and intoxication, often listens to no voice of reason. One of the men struck him from behind, and in the ensuing rage the leader of the group launched a brutal and frenzied attack, stabbing Father Donald repeatedly in the body and in the throat.

The two women who witnessed his death said that he endured the violence in complete silence, “like a lamb led to the slaughter”. He did not utter a cry of fear, anger, or complaint. He suffered as an innocent man, a faithful priest, trusting in the God to whom he had given his life.

His death was senseless, but it was not without meaning. It stands as a stark reminder that persecution is not a thing of the distant past, nor something that occurs only in far-off lands. It is close. It is present. It is real. And it continues to claim the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ today.

In the midst of this tragedy, our Scriptures today speak a word of truth and hope.

From the prophet Isaiah, we hear: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be alarmed, for I am your God. I give you strength, truly I help you.” (Isaiah 41:10)

In the face of violence and injustice, God does not abandon His faithful ones. Father Donald’s courage flowed from this promise. Even in the moment of his death, he was not alone.

And in the letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul urges the Church to stand firm in one spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and he reminds us that fidelity to Christ, even in suffering, is met with the unfailing fidelity of God. (Philippians 1:27-30)

This is not a call to seek suffering, but a reminder that suffering borne for the sake of Christ is never empty. It is held within the heart of God.

My friends, on this Red Wednesday, we are called to prayer, but also to action. We must stand with persecuted Christians, not only with our hearts, but with our voices. We must speak out when governments fail to protect the vulnerable. We must support the Christian churches and organisations that advocate for religious freedom. We must work for peace in our region and beyond. And we must teach our children that faith is a gift worth defending, and that dignity belongs to every person, no matter where they live or what they believe.

Today, we remember Father Donald, and all those who suffer in silence, unknown to the world but deeply known and loved by God. We honour their witness by refusing to be silent ourselves. May the Lord strengthen us, as He strengthened Father Donald. May He protect the persecuted, comfort the grieving, and stir the conscience of every nation.

And may we, the Body of Christ, stand together in steadfast faith, hope, and love, until persecution ceases and every person is free to worship God in peace. Amen.