Letter to St Patrick's Parishioners

5th May 2020 Letter *No 7*

Dear Parishioners,

We are now in the fourth week of Easter, celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. According to our calculation, it has been a little over six weeks since the lockdown began and we closed St Patrick's church in accordance with government and health regulations. Immediately after Jesus' Resurrection, the disciples were meeting in a room (possibly the Upper Room or Cenacle still existing in Jerusalem) which was in lockdown. The disciples deliberately locked the doors because they were afraid of the Jews who might come and threaten them or worse (Jn 20:19). Fortunately for them, the threat passed quickly. As we are hearing from our first readings on Sundays from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples soon became bold proclaimers of the Risen Jesus. At the Pentecost event, Luke tells us 'That very day about three thousand were added to their number' (Ac 2:41). Luke, the author of Acts, liked to keep an eye on the numbers of those who were being baptised (Ac 4:4, 5:14, 6:1, 7).

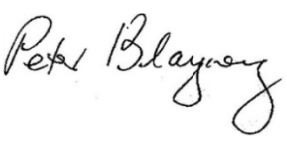
Last Sunday, 3rd May, we remembered in a modest way, the 200th anniversary of the arrival to our shores of a new generation of missionaries, fired up by the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, who came to Australia to preach the Risen Jesus. Last Sunday, the 10.30am Mass at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, remembered Irish priests Fathers Philip Conolly and John Joseph Therry. They arrived in Sydney on the convict ship *Janus* on Wednesday 3rd May 1820. They were the first officially recognised Catholic Chaplains for the colony of New South Wales. Their authority was given both by the Colonial Office in London and the Church in Rome. The Bishop overseeing the Church in Australia was Bishop Edward Bede Slater, whom Pope Pius VII (1742-1823, Pope from 1800) had appointed vicar-apostolic of the 'Cape of Good Hope, Madagascar, Mauritius, and New Holland [Australia] with the adjacent islands'. The "adjacent islands" included New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. Naturally, Bishop Slater never visited his far-flung nascent church in Australia or the Pacific.

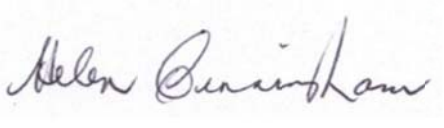
'Fr Therry described his life in Australia for the next forty-four years as 'one of incessant labour very often accompanied by painful anxiety'. Popular, energetic and restless, he appreciated from the beginning the delicacy of his role. He had to be at once a farseeing pastor making up for years of neglect, a conscientious official of an autocratic British colonial system, and a pragmatic Irish supporter of the democratic freedoms. Though respectful of authority and grateful for co-operation, he was impatient of any curtailment of what he considered his own legal or social rights as a Catholic priest in a situation governed by extraordinary circumstances'. (Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 2). Among many achievements in his long ministry here is his being instrumental in establishing St Mary's Cathedral, first opened in 1851. Fr Therry died as Parish Priest of St Augustine's, Balmain, on 25th May 1864, aged 74.

'In 1821 Father Conolly, an eccentric temperamentally incompatible with his companion, went to Van Diemen's Land, leaving Therry for five seminal years the only priest on the mainland. Articulate and thorough, he set himself the task of attending to every aspect of the moral and religious life of the Catholics. He travelled unceasingly, living with his scattered people wherever they were to be found, sometimes using three or four horses in a day. His influence was impressive among the Protestant settlers and outstanding among the convicts. He also early formed a lasting interest in the Aboriginals, who became very attached to him' (ADB, Vol 2). Father Conolly died in Hobart on 3rd August 1839, aged 53.

Let us continue to pray for each other and all those throughout the world suffering through this pandemic.

Yours sincerely





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