

Homily for St John Bosco 80th Anniversary 2018

We could not celebrate this anniversary in any other way than with an Ecumenical Liturgy. The fact that St John Bosco is still standing here as a place of worship is due in no small part to the determination of the whole community of faith in Kenilworth. It was the community which helped prevent the sale and loss of the Church not so long ago. We gather to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the blessing and opening of St John Bosco Church by Rev Dr James Duhig on 3rd April, 1938. However, the first Mass had been celebrated on the 20th March.

Of course, the Body of Christ was alive and well in the Mary Valley before the Church of St John Bosco was built. The first Christian service was held in the district in 1843 by the Lutheran Pastor Rev Christopher Eipper. The Sharry family was among the very first Catholics to live in the district in 1889. At that time Catholics were ministered to by the itinerant Catholic Priests. Fr McNabb was the first of these who passed through the region. Gympie was established as a Parish in 1868 after gold was discovered in 1867. Matthew Horan was PP.

The Catholic communion of Kenilworth was initially established through the Parish of Gympie. Priests would travel down the Mary Valley to administer the Sacraments to communities along the way. Mass would be celebrated in various homes and halls. Later on a Catholic mission was established in Caboolture in 1890. Its mission extended north to Nambour. Priests visited on horseback and train up the North Coast. When Nambour was formed as a Parish in 1919 Kenilworth became part of Nambour Parish. And as is well known Caloundra took over from Nambour in 1984 at the urging of Fr John Dobson who strongly supported the locals who were faced with the threat of closure. Then another change began in 2015 when Nambour once again embraced the community of St John Bosco.

“Anyone who is not against us is for us.” Those are the words of Jesus in the Gospel we read today. Would that Christians have taken them even a bit more seriously over the centuries as deep divisions emerged in the Christian movement. In small ways they have certainly been heeded in places like this where the need to support one another is so very important in isolated rural communities. Or in the words of Moses when reported that two outsiders were prophesying “If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his Spirit to them all!”

The coming of a Christian and Catholic presence is part of our human need to make a home for our families. We have to put down roots as we say. The expression of our faith in God as disciples of Christ is central to that sense of who we are and where we belong. This is Social Justice Sunday in the Catholic Church in Australia. The Bishops Statement looks this year at the crisis of homelessness that has gained a lot of attention in recent years. Some Australians feel abandoned by their homeland.

May I offer these words from anthropologist William Stanner, in 1968 quoted by the Bishops: “No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word ‘home’, warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean ‘camp’, ‘hearth’, ‘country’, ‘everlasting home’, ‘totem place’, ‘life source’, ‘spirit centre’ and much else all in one. Our word land is too spare and meagre. We can scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets. What I describe as ‘homelessness’, then, means that Aborigines faced a kind of vertigo in living. They had no stable base of life; every personal affiliation was lamed; every group structure was put out of kilter; no social network had a point of fixture left.” I think that gives a glimpse of what we all hope for in a home.

It is critical for us to have a home. Even if some do make a home of the street. For the Christian home is to be in communion. To be in communion with God in Christ and one another. That is where we find our identity as Children of God. It is where we find a firm foundation for our lives. It is where we find nourishment for our spirit and nurture for our hearts that are often torn or broken. It is where a simple act of hospitality such as giving a cup of water to the thirsty irrespective of race, religion, gender, or social status, helps bring about a communion of love that reveals the Kingdom of God.