

**REFLECTION ON THE OCCASION OF 150TH ANNIVERSARY ST
IGNATIUS' CHURCH 30TH JULY 2017**

Sister Raymond's classroom was like many Catholic classrooms in Australia in the 1950s. There was the crucifix; the statues of Our Lady and St Joseph –with little glass vases of flowers and coloured lamps for Feast Days; the pictures of the Sacred Heart, the Guardian Angel guiding the two children over the broken bridge; and, being a Josephite school, Mother Mary McKillop. However, in Sister Raymond's room, there was also a framed verse, written in beautiful calligraphy. It said,

'Every time I pass a church
I stop and make a visit
So that, when I'm carried in,
The Lord won't say, "Who is it?"'

In a very simple way, that verse reflects three key messages relevant to today's significant occasion when we come together to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of this Church of St Ignatius.

The verse refers to church, as a building, a physical structure.

It refers to being "carried in" which we might understand as the Eucharistic and Sacramental life of the parish – that is, its faith community.

And, it refers to the Lord – a loving ever present Supreme Being living in our midst.

The traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people, had already been displaced when a shrewd manoeuvre enabled the site for the Church to be purchased, albeit to the chagrin of some in the neighbourhood. In 1867, the foundation stone was laid. William Waddell, the architect who designed St Patrick's Cathedral, drew up the plans and through faith, hope and sheer determination, despite boom and bust periods in an area at times known as Struggle Town, the Church was built, culminating with the completion of the spire in 1923.

No matter the occasion, alone or in congregation, one cannot step into this Church without a sense of amazement and thanksgiving for those who had the vision, the courage, the tenacity, the generosity and the skill to build this magnificent structure – a landmark on the top of Richmond Hill, its spire dominating the surrounding landscape.

The altars, the stained glass windows, the timber panels of the soaring ceilings, the mighty columns ... physical aspects too numerous to mention but capturing the dream of making this a holy place, a place set aside to worship our God.

To be “carried in” brings to mind the Sacramental Life of the Church. For many of us, we were carried in at the beginning of our lives by our parents to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, thus, becoming part of the Mystical Body of Christ, God’s pilgrim people. Being carried in also brings to mind the end of our pilgrimage on earth when our loved ones and the faith community pray to the Lord to welcome us into the Heavenly Kingdom. Who could count how many Masses have been celebrated over 150 years in this Church? How many Baptisms, First Communions, Marriages, Receptions to Religious Life and the Priesthood, Requiem Masses, Rites of Reconciliation have been conducted? How many people and passers-by have stopped to “make a visit”?

Whilst we celebrate this consecrated space, at its core is the presence of Our Lord and the faith community. Many famous people have passed through these doors: at least one Prime Minister, leaders of government, industry and the professions, unionists, artists, sportspeople and, probably, some infamous characters, too. To walk around the church is to see remembrance brass plates or stained windows naming cherished loved ones, some of whom died long ago on far flung battlefields.

However, today, I would like to acknowledge the ordinary as well as the extraordinary people of our Parish: those who have gone before us who, for the most part, may now be forgotten and those who continue to serve in our midst. People who contributed and continue to contribute to the life of the Parish, particularly, the priests and brothers of the Society of Jesus, who have loved and served this community so faithfully. We

acknowledge the rich contribution of the different Religious Orders, Sisters and Brothers who have worked in Richmond as teachers, pastoral associates and in other capacities. We sing the praises of those who enrich our liturgies: altar servers, choirs and musicians, special ministers and readers; church cleaners, sacristans, collectors, flower arrangers, and all who care for the physical building, garden and grounds. We appreciate the work of those involved with the Parish administration, and we remember those involved in outreach work providing practical support for people in need. Of particular local note is the work of those involved with Epworth Hospital, the Friday Night School, and the Food Centre. And, finally, we salute the grass root parishioners, whose fidelity shines as example to us all.

Although the first peoples of this land were displaced, this parish has been an initial stepping stone in a new country for people forced by war, oppression, the whims of nature or economic necessity to leave their country of birth. Richmond Parish has flourished and been enriched by successive waves of migrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland, European and Asian countries, the African continent, and communities from our near North – in fact, from the four corners of the globe! We have young parishioners living away from their families to study in this country. We have parishioners who have lived in this community for over 90 years and we have third generation parishioners. We are all God's people.

This wondrous God of all. The third part of that little verse reflects on the presence of the Lord in our lives. In today's first reading, from the Book of Kings, we hear about God appearing to Solomon in a dream offering him anything he would like. God is pleased when Solomon asks for the gift of discernment – the ability of good judgement, to sort out what is of lasting value and to be treasured and what is passing, fleeting, momentary. How fitting that the gift of discernment, so highly favoured by Solomon was also highly favoured by St Ignatius the founding father of the Jesuits and the patron of this church. The theme of treasure is also found in today's Gospel. Jesus likens the kingdom of Heaven to treasure so precious that it becomes the most important thing in our lives. We are reminded to turn to Our Lord and ask for guidance to discern what is important, what to treasure, what is good and what will lead us to our Heavenly Home.

Today we give thanks to God for those who have gone before us and bequeathed us with the treasure of this wonderful Church - an inspiration and encouragement for ongoing love and service. May we, in turn, by our faithful witness, inspire future generations to come to know and love the Lord. May this sacred space remain a place of worship and welcome to all.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without end. Amen.

Prepared by Dr Therese Keogh, Richmond Parishioner.