

St James' Church, King Street, Sydney

**Patronal Festival Evensong
26 July 2020**

Address given by Bishop Richard Hurford, OAM KStJ

In the name of God the Creator, the Christ, the Spirit of God. AMEN.

I am grateful to the Rector Fr. Andrew for his gracious invitation to share in the Liturgy today as together we celebrate the Patronal Feast of this beautiful and historic church building of St James as part of its ongoing bicentenary celebrations.

I am glad too for the opportunity to worship with the many Benefactors of St James, who continue to provide down the years material, cultural and spiritual support for St James Church and its faith community.

The Rector has told me that the Patronal Festival Evensong address these days usually explores the connections between St James and the wider community both historically and contemporary.

I have been asked to reflect with you on the multifaceted connections between the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd in the Diocese of Bathurst and St James' down the years.

A considerable number of these connections revealed themselves to me during my years as Rector of St James. I want to focus on just two of them - both priests and educators who served as Bush Brothers in the Diocese of Bathurst and who - in their own unique ways enriched the life of the community here at St James and who both, like the response of James and John the sons of Zebedee who in the second lesson from Mark's Gospel at Evensong this afternoon, responded unhesitatingly to our Lord's call to follow Him.

The sheer geographical enormity of the thinly populated parishes in the far west of NSW has long stretched the capacity of parish ministry which traditionally finds its focus in a particular town or village.

In the west, churches belonging to the same parish might be hundreds of kilometres apart, with tiny congregations. This context has meant that the provision of ministry in the western districts has been an ongoing challenge for church officials since the beginning of European settlement in the region.

In the early years of the twentieth century, a 'bush brotherhood', the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd (BGS), was created to minister to the needs of these remote communities in the north-west of the Diocese of Bathurst. The BGS quickly developed into an iconic, much loved and valued ministry. When it ceased operations in the early 1980s it was the last surviving Australian bush brotherhood. In the early twenty-first century came a new vision to appropriate the BGS ministry for the contemporaneous needs of the north west.

When I was elected as the 9th Bishop of Bathurst, I was already familiar with the story of The Reverend John Dent Martyn, who became Brother John BGS, through seeing the plaque and the furnishings in the Children's Chapel in the Crypt of St James commemorating him. At the time of preparing to celebrate the 175th Anniversary of the Consecration of St James' Church, Professor Ken Cable loaned me a copy of 'Brother John' a tribute published by his sister Ivy Martyn who then lived at 141 Macquarie Street, Sydney. It was the story of this Melbourne boy who was born in 1902, the same year that saw the genesis of the BGS in Gilgandra NSW.

John then moved with his parents to Sydney, and his musical prowess - ultimately as a pianist, organist and singer led to his years at St Andrews Cathedral Choir School and finally to being a teacher there prior to entering St John's Theological College - then located in Armidale.

He was an excellent Scoutmaster and a competent footballer who endeared himself to everyone who knew him in the context of his daily life.

The 3rd Bishop of Bathurst, Dr. Long, ordained John deacon on the Feast of St James, July 25th, 1924 (which was the anniversary of his parent's wedding!), and he was sent to take charge of the Bourke district of the BGS. As a Brother he made a five year vow of celibacy, poverty and obedience.

In the five years that followed, Brother John, by God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, became a household name in Bourke and the scattered communities around it. His ability to humbly and compassionately touch the lives of people young and old across the social spectrum - was a legend which still survives today with so many stories !!

Hearing that Brother John's five years with the BGS were coming to an end the then Rector of St James, Dr. Philip Micklem, invited John to join him on the staff of St James.

October 6th, 1930 was John's first Sunday and it happened to be the 110th anniversary of the Laying of the Foundation Stone.

The month that followed saw John connect with a huge cross section of people - especially the marginalised, the sick and the poor. He spent proactive time in all of the parish organisations, and attended the sick and dying in Sydney hospital at all hours of the day and night. He took outdoor mission services in the Domain and Hyde Park and drew many men and women into the worship of St James and its organisations.

He founded the St James Football Club for men which was a huge success - but it was in this activity that he was badly injured with complications arising following surgery to remove a damaged kidney, and he tragically died - his Choral Requiem was held in St James on August 27th, 1931 and his cremated remains rest in the Crypt below. A capacity congregation attended the Requiem, with huge crowds standing outside the Church!

My second 'connection' with St James and the BGS was Bishop Ken Mason, who I first got to know when I was Dean of Grafton and he was Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions. When I came to St James, Ken had retired from ABM in 1993 and was now an honorary assistant at St. James, where indeed he had a spiritual home at first many years before when he was doing his teacher training in Sydney.

Ken was a valued friend and counsellor to so many folk around the Australian Church and was an absolute blessing to me and my wife Christine at the time, Ken's response - like the Apostle James, to the call of Christ to follow and serve, was lived into in an exemplary way - humbly and richly down the years of his life until his death on 20th December, 2018 aged 90. His Requiem was held in St James on the 9th January, 2019.

Bishop Ken had a long association with the BGS and served as Brother Aidan for nine years - initially for five years at Gilgandra, and then when the BGS extended its work into Carpentaria Diocese where he served in Darwin and Alice Springs. Ken then became the first Bishop of the Northern Territory in 1968. He was a huge support to me when I became Bishop of Bathurst and Chairman of the Board of Directors of BGS.

His insights into the history of the BGS and the profile of the Diocese were immense, and when I inaugurated the Company of the Good Shepherd as the successor of the BGS at a Liturgy in St Ambrose Church at Gilgandra on 22nd September 2002, the Centenary of the genesis of the BGS - the concelebrants of the Eucharist were three former Bush Brothers who became Bishops - Ken Mason, Graham Walden and Hamish Jamieson.

For so many, many years St James welcomed the Bush Brothers who came to Sydney for their annual campaign in January to raise financial support for the rural and remote communities of the north west of the State. These visits also stirred future vocations to serve as a Bush Brother.

More recently over the past twenty years parishes like St James continue to support the work of the Company of the Good Shepherd, the successor of the BGS where Companions, ordained and lay, married or single, men and women continue to make it possible for pastoral and sacramental ministry to continue in outback communities with fruitful outcomes found in the fusion of the traditions of the past with contemporary insights.

The members of the CGS and the BGS Council commit to pray daily this prayer which was written in his own handwriting on a rather ragged piece of paper found in Brother John's pocket wallet at the time of his death in hospital. I invite you to reflect on the words as I offer them in prayer to Christ the Good Shepherd now:

All through this day dear Lord
let me touch as many lives as possible for you
and every life I touch please bless by your Holy Spirit,
whether through the words I speak, the prayer I breathe or the life I live;
so shall your kingdom come on earth as in heaven. AMEN.