



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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Homily at Mass 2nd Sunday of Easter, Year C – 28 April 2019

The eyes of the world have been focused on the tear drop shaped island of Sri Lanka all this week. As we came in peace to our churches last weekend a small Sunday School group met at Zion Evangelical church in Colombo. “How many of you are willing to die for Christ?” their teacher asked them. All the children put their hands up. Did they know that they would be asked to do that very thing, dying along with hundreds of others at St Anthony’s Shrine and St Sebastian’s Church within the hour?

Many of our parishioners are proud of the fact that the Gospel was first brought to their ancestors 2000 years ago in the southern part of India by the Apostle Thomas, just north of Sri Lanka across the Palk Strait. We know that Sts Peter and Paul made their way to Rome and were martyred there: you can pray at their tombs today. Tradition provides rather misty accounts of the missionary work of the other apostles and their deaths, apart from St John who lived with Our Lady at Ephesus and tells us today that he spent some years in exile on the Greek island of Patmos. It is only Thomas that we know definitely that he travelled to India and preached the Gospel to the people there. They embraced the Gospel enthusiastically and in their turn they have passed it on generation after generation since. Thomas was martyred near modern Chennai. There is a shrine named for him on Mt Thomas still today.

All of us love tangibles – things we can see and touch and hold and feel. How many children and young people marched on ANZAC day wearing their grandfather’s war medals? ANZAC day each year always seems to throw up long lost diaries kept by Australian Diggers in the trenches of World War I, or old fashioned glass plate photographs discovered perhaps in a French barn, or in a trunk in someone’s attic. I’ve visited a number of homes over the years where families have a gallery of photos of parents, grandparents and great grandparents – wedding portraits, men in uniform, women in fancy hats. Sometimes a bride will dry her wedding bouquet and keep it in a frame. All of these things are precious to us – reminders of our past, our life, our family tree – they give us a sense of history and a bit of pride.

Let’s think about St Thomas – how did he preach the Gospel of Christ and the story of our Lord’s Cross and Resurrection to the people of India? What stories could he tell? What personal experiences could he share? As a school teacher once said to me, what props could he use? What connections could he make between himself and his budding converts? How could Thomas bring them to know Christ Jesus in the same personal unforgettable way that he had come to know Jesus, the Son of God, over 3 years walking the dusty roads of Israel, witnessing his miracles, learning to be an apostle?

Perhaps the most convincing thing Thomas could use was his index finger – “this finger” he could say as he held it up before their eyes, this finger touched the Risen Lord; this finger penetrated into the holes in his hands and feet and side. This hand felt his warm flesh – the risen Lord was no zombie or ghost, but real, tangible, alive. These eyes saw him eat; these ears heard him speak, greeting fearful men with peace, and empowering them to be agents of his Gospel: preachers, missionaries, teachers; ambassadors of peace, Divine Mercy, Easter joy. Ministers of mercy and the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Other Christs who would baptise and gather the people of God at altars all around the world, celebrating the Eucharist and sharing Christ’s precious gift, his Body and Blood, just as you and I do today and each Sunday, the Lord’s Day.

Let’s look up at the Easter Candle now. Today the Risen Lord looks on us his holy and baptized people, his Easter people, and blesses us with peace and joy. Can we hear his voice and see his gentle smile as he welcomes our faith and our Sunday worship, and all that we try to do each day to serve him, follow him and witness to his presence: “Happy are those ... you and me – who haven’t seen or touched the Risen Lord like Thomas and the others ... but still believe!”

Let us receive Our Lord’s blessing now from his hands that still bear the marks of the nails, but now holy and glorious wounds, trophies of his Cross, signs of his victory.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.