

Solemnity of Our Lady of the Southern Cross: 01/09/2024 St Patrick's, Mentone

The Feast of Our Lady of the Southern Cross is relatively new. I'm told that the name for the Australian Ordinariate, established just 12 years ago, was suggested by a former Parish Priest of Mentone and great hero of the Catholic Church in Australia – George, Cardinal Pell, who died just over 18 months ago.

But Cardinal Pell didn't 'invent' the name. It's origins go back, as far as I can discover, to the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba in Queensland.

A new church in that Diocese was dedicated under the title of Our Lady of the Southern Cross in 1960 [64 years ago]. However, there was then no liturgical celebration connected with this dedication.

Then in 1997 Toowoomba's Diocesan Liturgical Commission initiated a search to discover if, as was customary, a patron had ever been officially named for the Diocese. A search of the Diocesan archives, the Apostolic Nunciature in Canberra and the appropriate congregation in Rome, failed to find any record of a Diocesan Patron.

Following a diocesan survey, which garnered overwhelming support, the decision was made to seek the Holy See's approval to acknowledge Mary, under the title of the Southern Cross.

On 14th November 1998 Pope St John Paul II, issued a papal document formally recognising the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title 'Our Lady of the Southern Cross'.

The first celebration of the Feast of Mary of the Southern Cross took place on 1st September 1999 [25 years ago today] September 1st is coincidentally, also eight days before the Feast of the Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, thereby creating what is called an octave. It is also the first day of Spring. No other liturgical feast is celebrated in Australia on this day.

So, thanks to our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Toowoomba and to Cardinal Pell, Our Lady of the Southern Cross is also the patron of the Ordinariate in Australia.

September 1st is a day on which we especially pray for the Australian Ordinariate, established just twelve years ago by our beloved Pope Benedict XVI on the Solemnity of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

It was Pope Benedict, who in 2009, issued the papal constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, which enabled the reconciliation with the See of St Peter, of Anglican clergy and laypeople seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. It also made it possible for all Catholics to share the Ordinariate's liturgical, pastoral, and cultural heritage. Pope Benedict called these "precious gifts to be shared with the whole Church."

Through the Ordinariate we are in communion with the universal Church, the Mystical body of Christ. We are united with the Successor of St Peter, and our fellow Catholics throughout the world, both in the present and in ages past.

Today is an occasion to rejoice and to give thanks, and to renew these bonds of communion, and to pray that one day all Christians will be united in the one, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, under one Shepherd, sharing one faith, and speaking with one voice to a world desperately in need of a Saviour.

We are reminded powerfully of this role of evangelisation by today's Gospel [John 19.25-27].

Before the Cross, on which Jesus sacrificed himself for the salvation of the world, St John portrays Mary his Mother, the new Eve, standing undaunted [not, incidentally, swooning or fainting as so often depicted in sentimental works of art].

Then the dying Jesus voices his final will and testament: "Woman, behold your Son", and to St John the beloved disciple: "Behold your Mother."

Before our Lord surrenders his spirit, he is concerned to secure not merely suitable domestic arrangements for his Mother, but also to create a supernatural relationship between her and the beloved disciple, St John.

At this moment, our Lady is losing the beloved fruit of her womb. She is also being given by her son the gift of a vast family of children through St John, who is the representative figure of all her son's followers throughout the ages.

In being given the gift of a loving mother, he represents you and I. Taking Mary "into his home" means making space in his life for her who is now his and our mother also.

Making room for Mary in one's life is for Christians not some kind of optional extra.

Having given his last will and testament, the crucified Jesus then gives up his spirit, having declared that all is now completed, by which he refers, not only to his life's mission, but also to the commendation of his mother to the Beloved Disciple.

Our Lord's work of redemption is only fully comprehended with this mystical union established at Calvary between the Beloved Disciple and his Mother.

Our Lady had been reminded at Jesus' first miracle at the wedding of Cana in Galilee that Jesus' hour had not yet come. Now that it has come - at Calvary – she is assigned the role of nurturing and interceding for all her Son's beloved followers.

In the decree which established the new feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, in 2018, the Prefect of the Congregation [now Dicastery] for Divine Worship, Robert, Cardinal Sarah, declared:

"... the Mother standing beneath the Cross, accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal. She became the tender Mother of the Church which Christ begot on the cross, handing on the Spirit.

Christ in turn, in the beloved disciple, chose all disciples as ministers of his love towards his mother, entrusting her to them so that they might welcome her with filial affection."

Furthermore, in this scene, there is an aspect to which all mothers will be able to relate. Our Lady's firm faith doesn't mitigate her personal suffering as a mother. Here we see a mother losing her Son to a shameful and excruciating death, the innocent victim of the powerful forces of evil.

It fulfilled the prophecy of Simeon in the Temple, at the presentation of the infant Christ, that a sword would also pierce her own heart.

Mary, at the foot of the Cross, suffers along with her Son, and shares not only our joys, but also our pains and sufferings too, as she prays for us at the throne of grace.

As we rejoice today as those, like Mary, redeemed by Christ, as sons and daughters of his blessed Mother, and as citizens of this great south land of the Southern Cross, we can do no better than pray this prayer of our spiritual brother, St John Henry Newman:

O Holy Mother, stand by me now at Mass when Christ comes to me, as thou didst minister to thy infant Lord – as thou didst hang upon His words when He grew up, as thou wast found under his Cross. Stand by me, Holy Mother, that I may gain somewhat of thy purity, thy innocence, thy faith, and He may be the one object of my love and adoration as He was of thine.

Fr Ramsay Williams

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