

BISHOP MURPHY MASS – May 15, 2013

My brothers and sisters in 1795 when Francis Murphy was born in Ireland, Adelaide didn't exist, because as you all know Adelaide began when they gathered together in 1836 to proclaim the beginning of the new Province of South Australia which had been granted by the powers of the British Government.

Francis Murphy belongs to an extraordinary part of the life of the Catholic Church in Australia. One of the endearing and wonderful things about the Catholic Church in Australia is that bookmakers and brewers have always been the sources of vocations to the priesthood and religious life and Francis Murphy is right there in the middle of that grand tradition. His father not only brewed beer, he also distilled alcohol and spirits.

When Francis Murphy was a young man, it was already noticed that he had plenty of brains and he was sent off to college and ended up at the great new seminary that had been established by Royal ascent in Ireland at a place called Maynooth. The great college of the preparation for the priesthood, that was begun in Ireland to prepare the new clergy to lead the people of Ireland and Francis Murphy was an outstanding student. He ended up after his studies, being awarded a doctorate which was very rare in those days, but Francis Murphy was also an extraordinary young priest because although with his abilities and his education he could have carved out a great career in Ireland he immediately volunteered to become a missionary and went as a missionary after his ordination to Britain and it was in Britain that he met Ullathorne. Ullathorne persuaded him to come to Australia and he came here to dedicate himself to the mission in Australia for five years.

As it turned out, the irony was that when the Diocese of Adelaide was formed, Ullathorne was the one chosen by the Holy See to become the Bishop and he said no. So after a flurry of mail, which in those days took months and months going between Australia and Rome, the word came back that Francis Murphy had been chosen to become the first Bishop of Adelaide and he was the first Bishop consecrated a Bishop in Australia in St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, sometime before he ended up coming to Adelaide as our Bishop.

Francis Murphy was, in any company, an outstanding man. He was an outstanding priest with plenty of ability and came to Adelaide and became a very influential person in the climate and the circumstances of the colony that was beginning to be established. As it was well known, Catholics were not exactly the people who were most welcomed here. People were a bit worried about the appointment of a Catholic Bishop. They thought he would come and cause trouble for the colony and the community. But it didn't take long for Francis' abilities and his pastoral care to carve out a name for himself as being a really great pastor, not just for the Catholic people, but also for the entire community of South Australia.

That's why when he died, and his funeral came to an end in this building, his funeral procession from here was the longest in the history of the colony up to that date. It included, not just Catholics who had come to pay their last respects, but many non-Catholics of the community, including non-Catholic clergymen who had come to know him and to love him for the good man that he was.

And that's why finally the government decided that he, along-side Colonel Light, would be the only person whose body would be allowed to be buried within the confines of the city of Adelaide. So our first Bishop is buried here, just under the sanctuary behind the high altar. This special privilege was granted to him by the government of the day, by a special act of parliament that was passed sometime after his death, to honour him and to respect the great contribution that he had made to the life of the colony.

In these days of Easter, we read over and over again from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. It is really exciting to read the enthusiasm with which the disciples of the Lord went about preaching to the people everywhere all through the known world of that day about the risen Lord and the wonderful things He had done and how important it was to become engaged with Him.

This is still our message and this is still the exciting word that we have to share with the world today. This is why Francis Murphy left Ireland and went to England as a missionary and then came to Australia. He was captivated by the Risen Lord who gave him the strength and the courage and the love to become the great the pastor that he was; a great shepherd of his people, a great priest and a great leader of the community. He had a great capacity to do good things for the Lord because of the very special relationship he had with the risen Jesus.

We ask today as we celebrate this Mass, and we begin this society which is dedicated to his name, that we too will be filled with the same zeal and be captivated by the Risen Lord and be driven by our love for Him, to do all we can to make the presence of the Church in South Australia as resplendent as it possibly can be.

Our first duty is to be disciples of the Lord; to witness to the Lord by the quality of our love for God and our love for our neighbour.

Our second duty is to be witnesses to the Lord as we live in the world today, to convey to all those who surround us, something of the beauty and the wonder that there is, in belonging to Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Our third duty is to take care of the heritage that has been given to us by Francis Murphy and all those who followed him. A heritage which is expressed, not just in the lives and the works of those who have gone before us but in the beauty and the wonder they have left us as a testimony to their faith.

That we too, will be energised by the same vision and spirit, to do all that we can to enhance the heritage that's been given to us; to make it even more beautiful; to make it more able to spread the message of the Lord, by its beauty and by the way in which we adorn it with our faith; to spread the message of the Risen Lord being present in the world, today.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel today that we have no reason to be afraid, because whatever troubles come to us and whatever things we experience in our lives, He will be always there to defend us, to love us and to care for us. That's the great sustaining message of our Faith; that in the midst of all the things that can happen to us; all the travails we can go through in our lives; all the pain and all the difficulties we experience; the loss and the sorrow that we experience; that the Lord is present to us; loving us and caring for us. We know that and we know that when we turn to Him, that He will support us and care for us in the midst of our experience of life.

And now my brothers and sisters, we bring all of these realities together, we join with Bishop Murphy and all those who have gone before us, we bring our gifts of bread and wine to the altar and ask our Risen Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit to be with us; to renew us in Faith; to strengthen us that we will be better able to be His disciples as we live in the world today.