



MARIST BROTHERS  
Province of Australia

## SESQUICENTENARY OF THE MARIST BROTHERS IN AUSTRALIA

MASS OF THANKSGIVING | ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL, SYDNEY

Friday, 8 April 2022

Your Graces, My Lords, Father Corcoran and members of the Society of Mary, Concelebrating Priests, distinguished guests, Marists – Brothers, Association Members, Colleagues, Parents, students, ex-students and friends,

In terms of creation and the Christian story, 150 years is a short span. And yet it takes us back to a time before Federation and Prime Ministers, before World Wars to an extraordinarily different era. The four men who were sent to commence the Marist Brothers mission in Australia and who stepped ashore in Sydney on 26 February 1872 could never have imagined the profound and persistent changes that lay ahead, nor the evolution of the simple work they commenced in The Rocks. Yet the Marist project was blessed, even from initial stages. Within 3 years of their arrival, there were three Marist schools (St Patrick's, St Benedict's and Parramatta) and local men were joining the Brothers; the annals record that by mid-1874, the Brothers' residence at The Rocks bulged with 5 brothers, 7 novices and 3 postulants. And today? The situation is vastly different, but still blessed.

This sesquicentenary is not only a time to look back, but also to envisage what is ahead. And for me, as the current Leader of Province and Association, it's an opportunity to express gratitude, acknowledge failures and commit to the future.

St Marcellin's favourite, much quoted, scripture verse was from Psalm 127, "*If the Lord does not build the House, then in vain do the builders labour*". First and foremost, we offer thanks to God for the blessings bestowed on this Marist mission – and no better way to express that gratitude than gathered together for Eucharist, particularly here at St Mary's Sydney where this work began, and with the current Archbishop, the successor of the first, John Bede Polding who invited the Marists Brothers to Australia.

But God works through human vessels, and our gratitude is extensive:

- To the Brothers, who for over 150 years have committed themselves to the Marist way and given their energies and skills to its faith-filled expression. For the first 100 of these years, they were the ones who mostly carried the mission and ministries.
- To Bishops, who invited us to their Dioceses to expand and develop Catholic education, and to they and the clergy who have supported us over long years.
- To parents, who entrust their children to us and who still do. Your support, especially in the long years before government grants, has been indispensable. Collaborating together, good Marist schools have been created; ones in which we've all had great pride.

- To students and young people, the very reason for, and focus of the Marist mission, whose energy and enthusiasm, optimism and idealism, good will and openness, energises teachers and continues to enliven Marist school communities.
- To ex-students whose support, generosity and continuing encouragement have been of vital importance to nurturing this enduring mission.
- To teachers, staff, colleagues, women and men, who have collaborated with, and now lead the Marist educational mission.
- To the many others, both within and beyond Church, on whom we have relied for support, practical help, financial assistance, and encouragement.
- I particularly acknowledge the other members of our Marist Religious family – the Marist Fathers, Sisters and Missionary Sisters, and note that the Marist Fathers were closely involved, if not instrumental, in the Archbishop’s decision to invite us to Australia, and our Superior’s decision to accept.

How blessed we Marists of Champagnat have been!

Sincere gratitude to you all – so well represented in such numbers here in this congregation, and also online.

Tonight, it’s also appropriate to acknowledge our failures over the past 150 years. These are not confined to abuse, which has been well documented and highlighted in the printed welcome from Professor Hall and Dr Malloy. I fully endorse the sentiments they express. At various times and in different circumstances, we haven’t lived the vision of Champagnat as we should have. We have caused hurt, embarrassment, disappointment. We have been less than we should have. For these upsets and offences, we apologise and ask your forgiveness.

And what of today and the future? After 150 years, the Marist Mission in Australia is still alive with energy and enthusiasm. It’s certainly different to what it was, but I’m convinced the Lord is still building the house; or maybe more accurately, re-building the house. Our national family, the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat, continues to grow, and now leads the Marist educational mission. Many of the 1000 members are here or online tonight. Marist Ministries, Marist Schools Australia, Marist 180, Australian Marist Solidarity are expertly led by lay women and men and remain faithful to Champagnat’s intuitions. There is genuine communion with other parts of our Marist world, with the local Churches and with other charismatic communities. This is how it should be.

The Marists of Champagnat are committed, now and in the future, to working with and for the Church in Australia to educate and evangelise children and young people, particularly those most in need, in the way presented to us by St Marcellin. At the very heart of our continuing mission is the desire to *“make Jesus Christ known and loved”*.

Recently the last poems of the late Les Murray, were published. Let me read one, *Continuous Creation*, which is the title of the collection. (Don't be alarmed) it's short:

*"We bring nothing into this world  
Except our gradual ability  
To create it, out of all that vanishes  
And all that will outlast us"*

These 4 lines capture the essence of this sesquicentenary. The Marists arrived here with very few resources, yet through faith and patience, cooperation and collaboration, imagination and energy, and with the blessings of God and the ever-guiding presence of Mary, Our Good Mother, we have created something that will "outlast us". And that act of creating will continue after us.

Sincere gratitude to all responsible for this evening's beautiful Eucharist. Many are listed on page 17 of the mass booklet. I reiterate our thanks to Archbishop Fisher and Archbishop Comensoli, Bishops Long, Edwards and Brady, Marist Fathers and concelebrating priests, and also to Dr Malloy and the organising committee from Marist Schools Australia. I want to express our particular gratitude to the musicians and singers who have brought great beauty and joy to this celebration, and to the students present, some of whom have travelled long distances and most of whom are now on school vacation. Enjoy the holiday.

And to all of you who have honoured us with your presence tonight – here in the Cathedral or online, thank you for your participation and encouragement.

I hope you can join us in the Hall of St Mary's College after Mass for some Marist Hospitality. Good night, and may God continue to bless us all.

***Br Peter Carroll FMS***

*Provincial, Marist Brothers Province of Australia*