

*Homily of Emeritus Archbishop Adrian Doyle  
on the occasion of the blessing and dedication of the  
permanent memorial to Father John Corcoran Wallis  
and the Missionary Sisters of Service,  
the community he founded in 1944 in Tasmania.*

**St Brendan's Church Church, Alonnah, Bruny Island**

**25<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018**

**The Feast of Christ the King**

There is a story told about a man who was to be interviewed for a position in the security service of his country. He was told to be at the appointed place at 11am and when he arrived he found another four people already in the room. He assumed they too were applicants for the position. There was no secretary or receptionist to greet him, just a written instruction saying that the applicants were to knock on the designated door at 15 minute intervals to appear before the interview panel. At the conclusion of the interview, they would leave the room by another door.

While waiting, the applicants discussed the somewhat strange arrangement: they reflected on what questions they might be asked; they wondered what qualities would be needed most for the post. The last to arrive waited alone until 12.15 and then he knocked on the door and entered the room. He was very surprised to find that those sitting in the interview room behind the large table, were in fact the same people he had been sitting with in the waiting room. They were the interview panel, and the interview itself was already over.

In the reading today from the Gospel of St. John, we hear of the interrogation that Pilate conducted of Jesus. Pilate was the person responsible for maintaining the presence of the Roman rule in Judea. For the occupiers, the festivals of the Jewish people were regarded as potential emergencies. So Pilate made sure that his garrisons were in place, and that everyone was on alert, in case of an uprising.

It was a particularly difficult time - the Jews were celebrating their most significant feast, the feast of the Passover, and Pilate was happy to hand Jesus over to the Jewish authorities for them to deal with him. But the authorities were not interested, so Pilate had to take up the process himself. He began by asking the question whether Jesus was the king of the Jews.

But Jesus responds by asking a question himself. He wants to know the purpose of Pilate's question. You wonder who is in charge of the process. Jesus has his own agenda for the occasion.

Jesus wants Pilate to face up to the meaning of the question, but Pilate is not ready to go down that path. Instead he defends his own position by saying that he is not a Jew and that it was Jesus own people who handed him over. But Pilate is still keen to find out just what Jesus had done to create such hostility.

The response of Jesus is what we have come to expect - he is called upon to be a witness of the truth. He says "*I was born for this, I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth.*" Pilate may be sincere in his concern for Jesus, but he is not serious about the truth that he has discovered. The truth is not a force that will influence Pilate's behaviour. He fails the interview because of his unwillingness to meet the basic condition of witnessing to the truth.

As things move in the direction of the final phases of Jesus life, he is left to witness to the truth on his own. He puts up with the insults of the crowd and the silence of his friends. He may wonder where all the earlier witnesses to the truth have gone, and why there were so few of them when the authorities were out in force. He may wonder why he ended up being pushed around so much for the sake of the kingdom.

The final insult was when Pilate ensures that the title "*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*" is placed above his cross. It may be the closest Pilate ever gets to witnessing to the truth. What we do know is, that it is the unfailing witness of Jesus to the truth that marks him as a true king.

We are judged to be true followers of Jesus on the basis of how we have witnessed to his truth, his way and his love. For a place in the kingdom, we will be questioned about our attitudes and behaviour. We don't have to wait until the end to find out the questions we will be asked. They are being asked of us already.

When it comes to having a place in the kingdom of God, the questions are already being asked and the interviews are already taking place.

In a very particular way, today we are recalling two people in particular who, in their time, were witnesses to the truth. When asking the question "*What can be done for my children*", Mrs Hawkins was acknowledging that there was a truth which needed to be respected, and in whatever way possible, made known also to her own children, and to all children which were living in similar circumstances.

It is most appropriate that reference is made to this particular gospel passage at some point in today's proceedings. The phrase from the Gospel, "*go out into the highways and byways*" has played a significant part in what we might even term the promotional material and core message of the Missionary Sisters of Service.

The opening sentence of that parable (Luke 14: 18 – 24) tells us that things were somewhat tense on the occasion when Jesus went for a meal in the house of one of the Pharisees, and he was being closely watched. It was by no means easy for him, the task of trying to influence the attitudes of the people gathered, who believed themselves to be among the privileged few.

On the other hand, in the story which Jesus tells, the mission is to go out into the highways and byways of the town, and to bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, and to give them also the opportunity to hear the message of Jesus, and in particular, to learn that they were loved and valued every bit as much as the host of the dinner and the religious leaders.

The message was not just meant for one particular town, but for the whole

world, the world as was known at the particular time and the world that we know today. It has taken an enormous amount of courage, strength and vision on the part of millions, to bring about the widening of those horizons, to the world as we know it today.

They may have been waterways rather than roads, but whenever I come to Bruny Island, I cannot help but reflect on the courage, strength and navigational skills of the seafarers who first came from Europe and reached this particularly remote place at the ends of the earth.

Apparently Abel Tasman tried to anchor in nearby Adventure Bay in 1642, but his ship, the Heemskerck, was driven back by a storm, hence the original name of Storm Bay. The Frenchman, Tobias Fumeaux arrived in March 1773, and named the bay Adventure Bay, in honour of his ship, HMS Adventure. Thomas Cook stopped in the popular anchorage in 1777, William Bligh came here twice, in 1788 and 1792, and the French navigators Bruni D'Entrecasteaux stopped by in 1792 and 1793, and Nicholas Baudin in 1802.

Truly this is a most historic place, but it is even more so, as the place of conception, you might say, of the idea, which matured in the mind of John Wallis, after he had been questioned by Kit Hawkins during his visit.

Highways, byways, waterways, call them what you like, there have been people prepared to travel along them, often at great personal cost, and not without danger as well, bringing us to this particular moment when we are here commemorating those achievements, and searching for new ways to move further along the pathways into the future, but with the same message of the Good News.

Had Kit Hawkins never seen it as important to ask the question, who knows if anything would have ever happened.

Fr John, on his part, realised that the question had some very profound implications, namely the need to unveil to the next generation, the richness of the message of the Good News of God's love for us all, and the efforts made by Jesus to show the extent of that love through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection. Each of us is entitled to hear that message, and to be given the opportunity to respond in whatever the circumstances of our personal lives.

Today we recall with thanks, these two particular responses to the question: "*What is truth*" and the many others, especially the Missionary Sisters of Service, those present, and those who have already gone before us. We also remember those families and other individuals, in the various communities, who have assisted the Sisters in an infinite variety of ways. Particularly we remember the children, who were ready to make their efforts worthwhile, by responding to the opportunities which the Sisters created for them, often in difficult circumstances, and remote places, opportunities to hear the same Good News which we have been able to hear as well, and to reflect on together today.