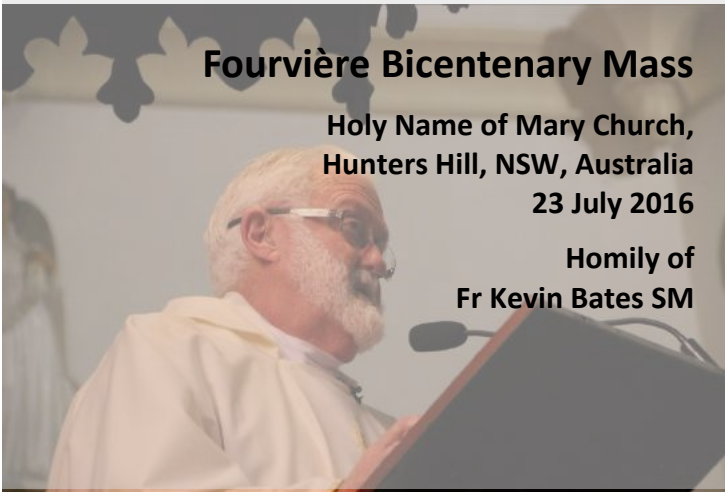


Fourvière Bicentenary Mass

Holy Name of Mary Church,
Hunters Hill, NSW, Australia
23 July 2016

Homily of
Fr Kevin Bates SM



Genesis 12, 1-7 God sends Abraham out on mission
Luke 1, 26-38 Mary gives voice to the shape of the mission that will be fulfilled in her son.

We gather with great joy at being together in a spirit of thanks and hope...

... as we recall and re-tell our founding stories which have their genesis in the Fourvière event, we remember a sense of adventure, courage, excitement, youthful energy and earnest faith... some of these young men had only been ordained for one day, so they didn't have too many runs on the board, but it wasn't long before that changed dramatically as they honoured the promise they'd made with such seriousness at Fourvière. Gathered here, and today in many other parts of the world, we are the living beneficiaries of their dedication and faith.

In each of our communities, our lay groups, our Sisters' communities of both congregations, our Brothers' communities and our Priests' communities, we can reflect on our early histories and tell tales of the heroes and heroes of yesterday, and look with wonder and awe at all that they achieved – as well of course as enjoying the stories of their abundant and sometimes lovable foibles and eccentricities!

We come now to our present situation, where in each of our Religious Congregations, our numbers are diminishing and some of the structures which once seemed to be God-given and unchangeable, are now no more! A world that for some of us when young, seemed secure, clear in its identity and direction, and supported by these seemingly unchangeable religious structures, has gone from us. We have choices to make now as we seek to re-imagine, re-discover and embrace our mission anew.

We celebrate today the names of Jeanne Marie, Françoise, Marcellin, John Claude and their companions. We still claim their spirit as our own. We wish to honour their memory and more, to embody their vision.

This vision was not about survival, small and fragile as the early Congregations were, but was as we know, focused on mission. This mission found its inspiration in the way in which Mary heard the Word, birthed the Word, nurtured

the Word and released the Word into the world.

Our vision was about the transformation of the Church and world, not through a process of conquest from on high, but rather through the sowing of seeds which could grow from within and find a ready home in whatever hearts and whatever cultures they were sown. In this the Marist vision was counter-cultural to a prevailing vision of mission which was about winning and converting, rather than gifting.

As we remember, honour and celebrate our history of two hundred years today, a little text from Ecclesiastes could give us a little nudge as we reflect on the present and face our future: "Do not ask why earlier days were better than these, for that is not a question that is prompted by wisdom" Eccles 6, 10

As we name today, the spirit which inspired our Founders, in the same breath we name our own hope. Much is being written and reflected on as this anniversary arrives, and while full of thankfulness, today's prophets are calling us to breathe new heart into our world and our Church. As we read through the vision statements that are being presented at today's Mass, we cannot help but be inspired by the courage, vision and faith of our sisters and brothers who are calling us into this new and uncertain era.

Our Marist Sisters commit us to creating still a Church with the features of Mary.

Our Marist Missionary community urge us to "set out in haste to the peripheries... discerning humanity's compass, to choose and evaluate without knowing exactly what shape or form our mission will take in the future."

Our Marist Lay Association see that we need to be mystics and prophets in communion with each other and with all creation. How in tune is this with our early Marists' vision of a contemplative as well as an active community.

Our Marist Fathers long for us to become more overtly Marist in spirituality and community life, in our identity and our mission:

- more international
- more collegial
- more open to working in collaboration with the laity
- and more courageous

Our Brothers see us as continuing to develop as game-changers for young people in a world that itself is changing its game every few minutes.

This call to be game-changers is an unbelievably huge assignment in the mobile world of today. We witness the recent arrival of Pokemon Go, Brexit, the events in Turkey, the South China Sea, the extraordinary rise of Donald Trump, the fracturing of the international Olympic movement, and the dysfunctional politics of our own country leading us to who knows where.

It's a world in which nobody's credit rating is assured.

It is in this maelstrom that God's saving Word longs to be born. It is in our hands and hearts and imaginations as Marists to play our part in this birthing, believing, that for all the labour pains involved, for all the temptations to become disheartened and allow the Word to be still-born, we will listen again and respond to Mary's gracious choice.

Our ageing, our numbers and our consequent re-structuring could lead us to lose heart and hope. On the other hand, hope can be re-born through this challenging time.

As society at large and as in the wider Church, much needs to die in order for the new church to be born. We commit ourselves again this day to be part of this new birth.

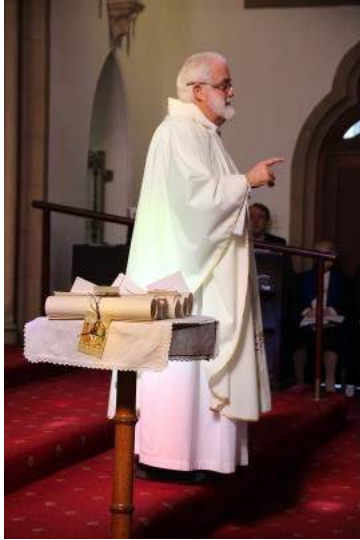
We hold an unshakeable belief in the beautiful spirit of Mary because we have seen with our own eyes the ways in which this spirit heals, comforts, challenges and enlivens even as it is passed on through our frail hands.

God bless us all as we come to this celebration, God bless us with wonderful memories and brave hopes as we continue to listen for Mary's invitation.

Song: *More than Memories*

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More than Memories

1. We gather to remember how two hundred years ago,
Imagination, faith and courage young men resolved to grow,
With Mary calling gently, each one by his name,
A family they created, their memory now we claim.

Ave, Ave Maria

2. Another time arriving needs more than memories now;
Imagination, faith and courage, must begin again somehow
So however Mary calls us we'll learn to hear again,
And breathe her gentle spirit in ways we'd not foreseen.

Ave, Ave Maria

3. While we celebrate our history our memories can't con-
strain

Today's imagination as we look around again

At a world without direction, whose deepest hunger hides
In the noises of our cities and the rush of busy lives.

Ave, Ave Maria

4. So Mary help us listen where God's Word may best be
born.

May your gracious choice sustain us; may your spirit be our
home.

May our founding grace soon risk again, may mission open
wide,

May we honour and embrace this time while you stay by our
side.

Ave, Ave Maria

*Pentecost Sunday 15 May 2016 Notre Dame de France, London. Marking
200 Years of Marist history.*