

Fifty Years since the closure of St. Patricks College East Melbourne. 24/11/18.

St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne. 10:00 am Mass.

In Darwin there is a museum that is a tribute to the terrible disaster that Cyclone Tracy caused to Darwin in 1974. Once I visited the museum and the guide who was a survivor of that terrible disaster shared the experience of the cyclone. He told us how the house began to rock, shake then to break up in sections. He described sheltering his young family in the bathroom. He told us that his youngest son pleaded that they should pray. He explained that he was not a religious man and so invited his son to begin. The young boy said the only prayer he ever heard. He said... *Dear God, for what we are about to receive make us truly thankful!*

A saying of Jesus was that the *child is the first in the kingdom of God* and in one way that prayer is the prayer of a saint, be it from the mouth of a boy. We can ask the question; can we ever be thankful for something that appears to us as a disaster?

There is little doubt that the closure of St Patrick's College, East Melbourne, at about this time, fifty years ago, was seen as a disaster. It was a huge disruption for many people who experienced great disappointment that a school, that was more than a school, was required to close its doors. I am sure that many people of the time, and no doubt in the present moment asked and continue to ask the great question from the soul... *God, Where are you, in all of this?*

The school crest that most of us remember well, is in part the Loyola family crest, the family of St Ignatius of Loyola who did so much to educate Christians to discern the deep questions of life. God where are you in the experience that we describe as 'disaster'. T.S. Eliot in one of his poems, highlighting the important link between experience and meaning, penned *We had the experience but we missed its meaning*. In similar fashion, Socrates said, an unreflected life is a non-fulfilled life.

We have had the experience but as Christians and through Ignatian Jesuit education, that we were fortunate to receive , we gather fifty years after the event and between hearing the Word proclaimed and the Eucharist to be shared, we reflect on the question ***God where are you in all of this; what is the meaning?***

The doors of the school may have closed fifty years ago but are they shut and bolted, in the darkness? Or is there a shaft of light illuminating our present lives and so revealing its true meaning?

If you have ever visited Pearl Harbour, the scene of a disaster, you may have visited the resting place of the SS Arizona. It sunk at the wharf and is a tomb for more than 1,100 marines.

Standing on the wharf, the ship which is a tomb lies under the surface but the remarkable fact is this. Bubbles of oil still make their way to the surface. The disaster happened in the past but the surfacing oil is of the present, so the past and the present are connected. It is as if it is outside of time.

The image is a useful one on many levels. Sometimes, we have things, deep down in us that remain buried but they still affects us, as the bubbles emerge into our present experience of reality. Maybe we feel as though our school was scuttled fifty years ago but, I suggest, the bubbles of influence still comes to the surface. Intentional Jesuit education formed us deeply, in ways that as a Patrician may surprise upon reflection.

Here are some simple memories I have. I share them, in the hope that it may spark your own simple memories and experiences, so that you too in recalling the memories may not miss, as T.S Eliot wrote, the meaning. There is a connection between our boyhood education and the men we are today.

Our teachers communicated....

.... that offering your seat to adults on public transport was a mark of respect and generosity to the person and a good thing for yourself to do.

...That we belonged to a school community, not a collection of individuals. This sense of belonging was described as School Spirit and it taught us we were made for community and not for isolation.

This had the effect that students would look out for one another. I have a confession to make. As naughty little grade fiver, I saw other kids, (obviously from Parade College) sticking match sticks into the parking meters along Gisborne St. and causing the timing mechanism to accelerate and so causing the red expired notice to pop up inside the meter. I had no knowledge what a fine was. It was older students who admonished me, explained the ramifications and put money into the meters again.

Another occasion, after late sport at Old Scotch oval, my father forgot to pick me up and it was a senior student who noticed I was waiting in the dark, rescued me and lent me my train fare.

I remember, Fr Drury, teaching us how to meditate in the Ignatian style of imagination. He also asked us to memorize our school motto, *Semper et Ubique Fidelis* and implanted the meaning as a guide for our lives... Always and Everywhere Faithful.

What great guidelines for the experience of life that laid ahead of us. It gave us meaning. Respect, generosity, recognition of those in need, the morality of our actions, love for community, prayer and faithfulness became constants for life.

These and many other gains through Jesuit education bubble constantly in our lives. The doors of the school may have been closed but they are not shut. The light still shines through the cracks.

Our first reading sets a scene for education. An old wise man Eli lives in the Temple and is tasked to train, to educate the boy Samuel in the ways of faith and life. The boy, hears a stirring, his name is called. He wakes the old man once, twice and is told to go back to sleep. He hears the third time and it is then the old man Eli, realizes this is the moment of growth, change and insight for the boy. He, like a good Jesuit educator, does not say, *Go back to the way you were...or... it is only a dream* but coaches the boy how to grow into the vision by saying, ***Speak, for your servant is listening.***

When we were boys, this is something of the dynamic in our education that we experienced and later on in life, we caught its meaning.

St Patrick's was more than a school, from its beginning it was a college to educate boys and men to fulfil what we now describe as their baptismal call to serve, contribute and influence not only the catholic community of the colony and later the State of Victoria but the wider community. It has been and continues to be a powerhouse of education. This continuation to spread the light from behind the closed doors of the College has been the work of SPOCA and they should be acknowledged and thanked for their vision in making possible the SPOCA Scholarship as a legacy of SPC to encourage excellence in teaching at St Patrick's Campus ACU. I note that the scholarship is not for the best student but its intent is to ensure excellence in teaching. It is also marked

by SPOCA's sponsorship of Ignatius College, Leopold and I acknowledge the College Principal, Vice Principal and School Captains with us today.

Which leads us to reflect on the Gospel, the Walk to Emmaus, the post Easter scene when Jesus is **teaching** his disciples, after they with downcast faces, described the disaster of Good Friday.

And for us today, Jesus, like a good teacher, walks alongside us, not before or behind but with us and asks, what things? Then he goes on to explain the meaning of the experience, and their eyes were opened, their hearts burnt, and they saw the light before it disappeared but they turned around to begin again. And so, in the ways of faith and education, our story may change context, it may seem that it comes to an end but the story of faith and education never ends but renews itself and begins again. This the dynamic.

St Patrick's College was in reality a school community. It was made up from the parents and their sons who appreciated that they were gifted with such a wonderful opportunity for Jesuit education, the nature and quality of which they would not otherwise would have received. It came from men as (and these are from my era, you may have further names you can recall)... Frs. Drury, Hudspeth, Moloney, Muirehead, Collopy, Bartels, Deanou, Quigley, King, Jones, Lake-Smith, Pietsch, Brown, Olsen and Messrs. McConville, Van Baer, Quinn, Hawkins, Thompson, Cameron, Papworth and Fountain, as well as many from other eras, who importantly knew us by name. We felt loved and valued. It was a wonderful era but now we realize that it could not have survived many more years with the subsequent lack of vocations, the demands of modern education for abroad curriculum, especially for a single stream school.

But we can say that the light of education we did receive and through us and through the Spoca scholarship, continues to bubble to the surface, according to our motto; ***Semper etUbique Fidelis.***

*This is the meaning of the experience we were given and continue to give to others.... **Always and Everywhere Faithful***

Fr. Gregory Bourke