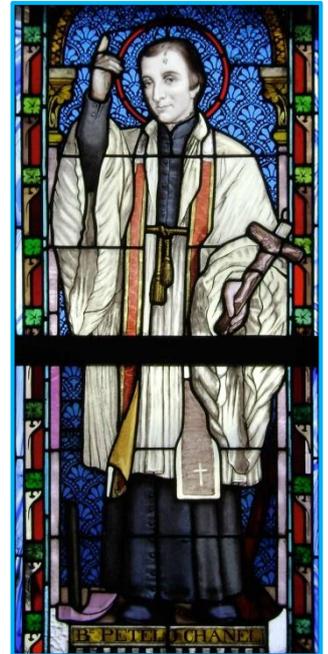


On Sunday, May 1, 2016, the Tongan Community in Mildura celebrated the Feast of their Patron Saint, Peter Chanel, a French Marist Missionary.

Peter Chanel went to the Island of Futuna accompanied by a lay brother and an English layman. They were at first well received by the pagans and their King Niuliki who had only recently forbidden cannibalism. However, the King's jealousy and fear were aroused when the missionaries learned the language and gained the people's confidence, he realized the adoption of the Christian Faith would lead to the abolition of some of the prerogatives he enjoyed as both high priest and sovereign.

Finally, when his own son expressed a desire to be baptised, the King's hatred erupted and he dispatched a group of his warriors to set upon Peter Chanel. Thus, on April 28, 1841, three years after his arrival, he was seized and clubbed to death by those he had come to save. His death brought his work to completion - within five months the entire island was converted to Catholicism.

Catholic Tongans, wherever they may be have great devotion to St Peter Chanel.



Above: Josh Fonu, Umu vatuva, Heiata Fonu

Above: Some members of the choir



Decorated Shrine to St Peter Chanel



Some of the handmade Tapa (Ngatu) cloths used as a mark of respect in the community are pictured above. Both men and woman wear, on special occasions, a hand woven fine mat which is tied about the waist with a girdle (fakaha'apai) as a token of respect. This resembles the wedding garment Jesus spoke about in one of his parables. A special handmade necklace (kahoā) is presented to the Celebrant. These can be made of leaves or flowers, but those presented to Fr Mick on this occasion were made of chocolates and sweets. Frangipani flowers strung onto thread and draped around the sanctuary added to the decorations which helped to make this a truly happy occasion. A feast of Tongan food was available for parishioners after Mass.

*Sr Rosemary Graham rsm*



*Top photo: Pierre Chanel (Petelō Saineha), window of the Catholic Church of Lapaha, Tonga  
By Tau'olunga - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5572790>*