

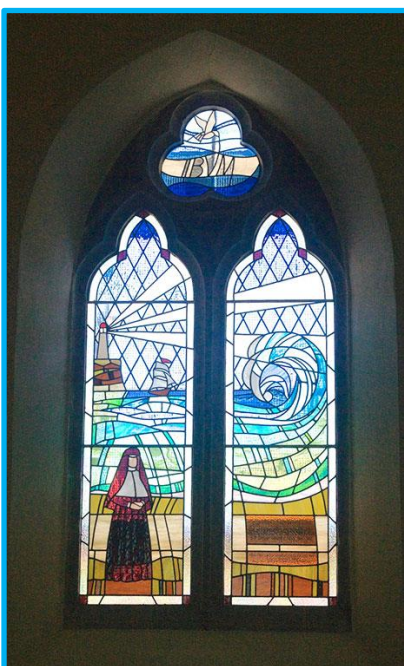


## DEDICATION OF THE LORETO WINDOW AT ALL SAINTS CHURCH

A full house of parishioners and community members witnessed the dedication by Bishop Paul Bird of the new Loreto leadlight window in All Saints Church Portland. The window is in appreciation of the spiritual, educational, pastoral and cultural contribution of the Loreto Sisters of the Parish and community of Portland from 1884 – 2013.

Bishop Paul Bird said the window was a beautiful permanent reminder of a remarkable one hundred and thirty year relationship of the sisters with the people of Portland. It features a Loreto Sister in the dress of the late 1880's, a figure that became so familiar to so many, a sailing ship by which Mother Gonzaga Barry and the first Loreto Sisters came from Ireland to Australia, the lighthouse, so crucial in early days for safe navigation, the shoreline of what is known as Nuns Beach Portland, a favourite private place for the Sisters to swim and relax, a wave representing the importance of the sea to Portland and the building of Australian communities and a bird in flight over the initials of the Loreto Institute - IBVM

The window was designed by Bayview College Portland Arts teacher Sharon Clark, assisted by her students, made by the Portland Lead lighters Guild and installed by local glass and aluminium business operator, Jamie Cram. Funding for the window was raised by the local community and parish.



The Loreto order was established in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century by Englishwoman, Mary Ward. Its Ministry was and still is known today as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – IBVM. In 1875 Bishop O'Connor of Ballarat requested IBVM Dublin to send Sisters to his diocese to establish a school for girls. Mother Gonzaga Barry and nine companions came to Ballarat and established the school and community which became Mary's Mount.

Mother Gonzaga became a frequent visitor to Portland for health reasons and after much urging from Portland priests and the Catholic community, she decided to establish a school. In December 1883 the Sisters came to Portland and by 1903 Loreto convent was completed.

In 1885 the Sisters assumed responsibility for All Saints Primary school, which had been operating since 1849 as well as for the running of Loreto convent and boarding school next door. In his reflection on the symbolism of the window, Bishop Bird said the Loreto Sisters found strength, light and protection through God to carry out their work, all of which is depicted in the window.

Province Leader, Margaret Mary Flynn IBVM said this was indeed a special day and that she was unaware of any other such lasting tribute to the Loreto Sisters and their work anywhere else in Australia. She said the window represents

the wonderful one hundred and thirty year relationship of the Portland and District community with the Loreto Sisters. Sr Margaret Mary acknowledged the strong pioneering spirit of the women who came to Portland to establish a centre for education and that Portland and All Saints Parish would forever remain in the hearts of the Loreto Sisters.

The dedication was attended by eight Loreto sisters including Sisters Hilary Blackie, Frances Browne, Denise Demarchelier, Roberta Hackendorf, Helen Murphy, Helen Parer, Margaret Sculley, and Province Leader Margaret Mary Flynn, representatives from the Glenelg Shire Council, Bayview College Board members and teaching staff, staff from All Saints Primary school, the Lead lighters Guild, representatives from Portland churches, All Saints parishioners, former Loreto students and the general community. After the dedication lunch was enjoyed by all.

*Fr Greg Tait*



[Bishop Paul Bird's homily on this occasion can be read below:](#)

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### Third Sunday of Year A - Portland, 10.30 am, January 22, 2017

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Today we're celebrating the contribution of the Loreto Sisters to the community of Portland. The first group of Sisters came here in 1884. When they arrived, there was an article in the Portland Guardian speaking of the Sisters' coming as a new and important addition to the educational resources of the town. The newspaper suggested that the Sisters' impact would likely grow and bring benefits not only to the town but to the whole district.

As it turned out, the Loreto Sisters continued their presence here until 2013. That's nearly 130 years. The Sisters lived in the midst of the people of Portland all through those years and they taught generations of children from Portland and beyond.

In our Mass this morning, we give thanks to God for the blessings of those years. We give thanks for all the Loreto Sisters who have served here. We remember their presence and their service as we dedicate a memorial window.

In those early days, the leader of the Loreto Sisters in Australia was Mother Gonzaga Barry. She had a holiday in Portland in 1881 and, during that time, the local people asked her to return and help with the education of their children.

In 1884, Mother Gonzaga came back with five companions and set up the first Loreto community here. In 1885, they took up the care of All Saints Primary School.

From the beginning, the local people made the Sisters welcome. One of the practical helps they gave was to build a gate and some steps so that the Sisters could have easy access to the beach. I understand that the beach is still called "Nuns Beach". The people of the parish were very positive towards the Sisters.

The Sisters were likewise very positive towards the people of the parish. In 1893, Mother Gonzaga wrote to the children at All Saints School: "What is there in the world wanting to us? Only one thing – to be saints. But you are 'All Saints' in Portland!"

In the window that we will dedicate this morning, there is an image of a Loreto Sister. There are the letters IBVM, referring to the Loreto congregation's official name, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Sisters looked to Mary to intercede for them and they sought to follow Mary's example of love and service. There is also an image of waves of water. Fr Greg pointed out to me that we could see varied symbolism in the water.

We could see a reference to the Port of Dublin where the Sisters sailed from when they came to Australia. We could see the water as suggesting the Gulf Stream, the warm current that keeps Dublin harbour from freezing over in winter and so keeps the harbour open. There is an Irish tradition that sees in this warm current an image of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Mary's care for us is like a wave of warm water that keeps our hearts from freezing over. Her love helps to keep our hearts open to Christ. We could use a similar image for the role of the Loreto Sisters, the members of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through their love and care for the people of Portland, they helped to keep people's hearts open to Christ.



As we look at the Loreto window, the waves of water could also suggest the waters of Portland where the Sisters arrived in 1884. There is the special local feature of the Bonney Upwelling, when nutrient rich waters well up from the deep sea floor and bring great fertility to the seas around Portland. This could be a symbol for us of the fertility of faith, the faith that inspired the Sisters. It is a faith that can inspire us too and bring us new life.

As we remember the Sisters who served here for so many years, we might look back even further to Mary Ward who founded the Loreto Sisters over four hundred years ago. Among Mary Ward's writings, we find this reflection: "Our happiness, security and progress are not to be in riches, greatness and favour of princes, but in having open and free access to God almighty, from where must come our strength, light and protection."

Mary Ward recognised the values of happiness, security and progress. Where would these be found? In her view, they would not be found in riches, in material wealth. They would not be found in greatness, in being considered a great achiever. They would not be found in the favour of princes. They would not be found in currying favour with people in high places. Rather, happiness, security and progress would be found in having open and free access to God almighty, in being able to draw close to God in prayer. It is in God that we'll find strength, light and protection.

This was Mary Ward's approach and this was the approach of the Loreto Sisters who served for so many years here in Portland. They found their strength, their light and their protection in God.

This is well illustrated in the memorial window. There is the figure of the Loreto Sister, standing calm and strong. Her strength is in God. There is a lighthouse with rays shining out across the waters. The Sisters found their light in God. There is a ship sailing across the seas. In the perils of the journey from Ireland and in the perils of the journey of life, the Sisters found their protection in God.

There is a spirit of confidence in this memorial window. It suggests to me Mary Ward's spirit of confidence in God almighty and it's very much in tune with the spirit of confidence in the Scriptures for today's Mass. It is a spirit of confidence and hope, expressed so well in the psalm: "The Lord is my light and my help; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; before whom shall I shrink? I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living. Hope in him, hold firm and take heart. Hope in the Lord!"

We give thanks for the strength and light and protection that God gave to the Loreto Sisters through their years of service here in Portland and we pray that God will continue to grant us the strength and light and protection we need in our lives today.

