

A WONDERFUL MILESTONE

January 22, 2018 was a momentous day in Sunraysia. Sisters of Mercy and Parishioners from Merbein, Mildura and Red Cliffs joined together to celebrate with Sr Grace Rogers on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of her profession as a Sister of Mercy.

Mass was celebrated at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church, Merbein by Fathers Michael McKinnon PP and Patrick Flanagan. The reflection on the readings of the Mass and the impact of seventy years of faithful service to God's people as a Sister of Mercy was delivered by Sr Berenice Kerr, the Community Leader. This reflection follows below. During Mass Grace renewed her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which she first took seventy years ago. Grace was delighted to have her brother, Martin Rogers (pictured below left with Grace) and her sister Tess Kerr present to celebrate with her and take part in the offertory procession during the Mass.



After Mass, the Mayor of the Mildura Rural City Council, Councillor Mark Eckels, congratulated Grace and expressed his sincere thanks to her for many years of dedicated service in education and pastoral care and expressed the need in our community for many more people of such calibre, dedication and commitment. All then enjoyed the wonderful, country hospitality of afternoon tea in the Merbein RSL where the cake was cut, a champagne toast was made and tributes were given to Grace from family and friends.



REFLECTION ON THE MASS READINGS

[Hosea 2: 16, 21, 22](#)

[Matthew 11: 25-30](#)

The readings chosen for today's liturgy speak of fidelity: God's fidelity to Grace and Grace's response to her God, which has expressed itself in generous, faithful service of God and God's people.

God, as we know, is a God of mercy – a quality variously referred to in the scriptures as steadfast love ... faithfulness ... tenderness. We gather today to celebrate the fact that, more than 70 years ago, God spoke softly to Grace's heart inviting her to a life of mercy. I'm not sure that the mercy novitiate of that time could be described as a wilderness, but, that being as it may, in response to God's invitation of integrity and justice, of tenderness and love, Grace came to know her God and was moved to make her commitment in poverty,



chastity, obedience and service on January 22, 1948. Grace's motto 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord' echoes the 'Yes' of Mary when God spoke to her heart, and Grace has lived her 'yes' every day since.

I would like to suggest that one reason why Grace was so able to make her commitment was that she had already experienced tenderness and love, integrity and justice in her family. Matthew's gospel refers to 'things' hidden from the wise and learned. These had been revealed to Grace since her childhood - the relationship between Jesus and his God was modelled in Grace's family. Had Jesus lived in Sunraysia,

Matthew would have written about irrigation channels, drying racks and dip tin rather than yokes and beasts of burden. Nevertheless, through daily life on the block, through the love and tenderness she experienced from her parents and her 12 siblings, Jesus revealed his God to Grace. Grace in her turn revealed God's love to them. Those family members who are here today are testimony to the deep love shared among the Rogers family.

Throughout her religious life Grace served God as a primary teacher and principal, later as a librarian and parish worker. God beckoned her to serve in Mornington and Dennington, Warrnambool and Kennington (there's a certain rhyme and rhythm there!) – in Burnie and Shepparton, Terang and Merbein – and several other places as well. Each time God beckoned Grace said 'Yes'.

There must have been times when she was weary and burdened. She will tell you stories of hard work and deprivation, but always with a gentle smile. She will tell you of demands from superiors which sometimes seemed impossible, but she will tell these stories with her classic humility. There's never any bitterness or self pity with Grace. When Jesus spoke of being gentle and humble, he could well have been describing Grace whose life has demonstrated that Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden light. Not that she's a pushover ... Far from it! There's a quiet tenacity about Grace especially when it comes to defending the rights of the downtrodden or championing the cause of those who have been wronged.

So now Grace continues to serve her God in her apostolate at Chaffey Aged Care. Many a homeless person has been the recipient of a scarf knitted by Grace to shield him/her from the winter chills; many a resident at Chaffey is cheered by her smile or amused by her dry wit.

70 years of union with Jesus and learning from him! Seventy years of vowed Mercy life! Grace we congratulate you; we thank you for revealing to us the joy of a life of service. We have learned from you for you too are gentle and humble of heart. May God continue to bless you in integrity and justice, in tenderness and love.

