



## ALL SAINTS PORTLAND CELEBRATES



A wonderful celebration commemorating 175 years since the first Catholic Eucharist in Portland, was held on November 3 at All Saints Church Portland.

Many people attended the event, including the Mayor of the Glenelg Shire, Cr Anita Rank, visitors from local and surrounding district churches. Bishop Paul Bird concelebrated the Mass with Fr Gregory Tait, Parish Priest.



Fr Gregory said the event, which included a Mass followed by a luncheon at Bayview College next door, was a wonderful community celebration. "We are very fortunate in Portland to have a rich history to be celebrated. The marking of the first Mass to be celebrated in a local Portland store by Archbishop John Bede Polding OSB, who travelled from Sydney in 1844, was an opportunity to reflect on the importance of occasions such as these."

In his homily, Bishop Paul gave a brief history of the occasion saying how much Bishop Polding's effort to travel to Portland would have been appreciated. "It cannot be underestimated what a highlight this

would have been to the estimated two hundred and fifty Catholics who had made the new settlement their home but had been without a priest in the community since their arrival," Bishop Paul said.

During the Mass, Bishop Paul rededicated the Sanctuary and its new furnishings, recently acquired from St Joseph's Church in Hawskdale, in particular consecrating the Altar before the celebration of the Eucharist as the centrepiece of the occasion.

Fr Gregory remarked at the end of Mass that it was wonderful to have the presence of the Good Samaritan Sisters whose congregation was founded by Archbishop Polding in 1857. Fr Gregory also commented that the next occasion for celebrations at All Saints Parish will be in three years' time when the Parish marks 175 years since its founding in 1847.

*Fr Gregory Tait, Parish Priest*



The first Mass in Portland was celebrated by Archbishop John Bede Polding on this day, 3rd November, in 1844. The Mass was offered in Mr Tullock's store. For thousands of years before that, the Gunditjmarra people had lived in this region, but 1844 was early times as far as European settlement was concerned. It was early days in the colony. The land we call Australia was still called New Holland. The area we call Victoria was still called the District of Port Philip.

By 1842, around 800 people were living in and around Portland. We find some interesting points in a letter written by Alexander Laurie, the first Presbyterian minister in Portland. He wrote, "The population of the township and suburbs of Portland may be estimated at around 800 souls. The most numerous class are the adherents of the Church of Rome." He mentioned that the Catholics had no priest at that stage and that some of them occasionally attended the Presbyterian service. He also wrote, "Not a few of them came voluntarily and offered me a subscription for our church." So we had some of the Catholic community occasionally joining in prayer with the Presbyterians and offering the Presbyterian minister some financial support for the building of the Presbyterian church. In the following years, there was mutual support among the different denominations, helping one another build churches for the various Christian communities. I'm pleased that this spirit of mutual support continues in our own times. Today, for example, we'll be sharing lunch in the ecumenical Bayview College.

In 1844, Dr Polding, Archbishop of Sydney, visited Melbourne. From there he went by steamer to Geelong and from there he came by horseback to Portland. Up to that point, the Catholics of Portland had never had a visit from a Catholic priest or bishop. As was recorded around that time, they had not had "the opportunity of partaking of the Life-Giving Bread of the Blessed Eucharist." Archdeacon McEnroe was travelling with Dr Polding. The Archdeacon commented that it was edifying to witness the piety and fervour of the people of Portland.

Those words of appreciation from Archdeacon McEnroe are like the words of St Paul that we heard a few minutes ago referring to the Christian community in Thessalonica. St Paul wrote, "We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring." St Paul gave thanks for the faith and love of the Thessalonians. Archdeacon McEnroe gave thanks for the Christian piety and fervour of the people of Portland. Today, I give thanks for all of you who have gathered for this anniversary Mass. I give thanks for your faith in Christ. I give thanks for your love for one another and your love for God.

I also draw on the prayer of St Paul. As he prayed for the community in Thessalonica, so I pray for you. May God fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith among you.

In the reading from the gospel according to St Luke, we heard of Zacchaeus who was keen to see Jesus. He was so keen that he climbed a sycamore tree so that he could see Jesus clearly. Jesus recognised Zacchaeus' faith and he went to stay at his house. As we gather for this time of prayer today, we too are seeking to draw near to Jesus. Happily, Jesus is always ready to draw near to us. In a sense, he comes to stay at our house. He promised that where two or three gather in his name, he would be there. We have gathered in the name of Christ in this church of All Saints and we believe that Jesus is here with us.

We rejoice as we remember that first Mass in Portland 175 years ago. We rejoice that we are able to celebrate the Mass here today. As Jesus was with those people who gathered for prayer in 1844, so may he be with us now. May he be with us and may he bless us with all the gifts we need.

*Bishop Paul Bird CSSR*