

Anniversaries 2021.

P.J. Connors, 60 yrs; P.K. Hudson & M.J. Linehan, 50 yrs.
P.J. Flanagan, 60 yrs in 2020; B.V. Finnigan, 50 yrs in 2020; George Kuruvila, 25 yrs in 2020.

Today's Mass, as the bishop told us in his introduction, is not only an acknowledgement of those of us who are recalling significant anniversaries of ordination, but it is the Mass of St John Fisher and St Thomas More, English martyrs whose feast is kept on this day every year. The reason that the memorial of St John Fisher and St Thomas More is commemorated today is that it is the actual 486th anniversary of the infamous judicial execution of John Fisher at Tower Hill (the one in London, not ours in the Western District). I don't know that any of us whose anniversaries are being honoured today will be remembered in 486 years' time, but I, for one, am honoured that people wish to pay respect to us for anything that may have been achieved through us in the course of the years that are being acknowledged tonight.

I am, of course, conscious that there have been what you might call (as Kipling did) both triumph and disaster in every life. But the same Kipling was prepared to acknowledge, in his poem, *Eddi's Service – A.D. 687*, the simple devotion of a simple priest who conscientiously fulfilled his duty while his neighbours, the pagan Saxons, mocked him. And I think, that we who live in an era and a place where there are those who mock priests can nevertheless look here at the sanctuary and there in the congregation at some ordinary blokes who have made extraordinary priests, in many cases purely and simply by their simple devotion to the People of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It was here in Ballarat that the expression "the People of God" came alive for me in a way that previously it had not. At the great Council of the twentieth century, Vatican II, the expression The People of God was used to signify the membership of the Church, all the baptised, male and female, ordained and not ordained, saint and sinner, young and old – "here comes everybody" as James Joyce said in another context. But one day, on a visit to St Alipius School when I was Parish Priest at Redan, I was confronted with a poster that said, "All People Are the People of God" and how can you deny that? If we are to "render to God the things that are God's", who and what do we plan to leave out? Isn't all creation God's creation? And therefore can't we see that people like Bishop Connors and Peter Hudson and Bishop Finnigan and Patrick "Flags" Flanagan and George Kuruvila and any number of decent, uncomplicated, not-too-sophisticated priests have done and continue to do great service to the benefit of the people they have been sent to and actually to all God's creation.

With the Psalm that was recited after today's first reading, and in the context of the commemoration we acknowledge tonight, we can recite without exaggeration, "What marvels the Lord worked for them! What marvels the Lord worked for us! Indeed we were glad!"

I hope and pray that gladness may attend us for whatever time is left to us. May we continue, even if as not-very-sophisticated members of the People of God to render to God the things that are God's and to rejoice with the pearl of great price that we have been guided to and have found amongst the priests and other people of this Diocese of Ballarat.