



**7th Sunday of Easter Year A: Joining in the sufferings of Christ**  
**Homily by Fr Robbie Low**

***Readings: Acts 1:12-14, Ps 27, 1 Peter 4:13-16, John 17: 1-11a***

*Be glad to share in the sufferings of Christ* 1 Peter 4:13

A couple of weeks ago Sara and I were in Launceston, enjoying a couple of days away from desk and parish respectively. The purpose of our stopover was to worship in that little jewel of a church dedicated to the martyr, Cuthbert Mayne, and to visit the site of his execution.

The first was a joy as we entered a well of deep silence before the Lord and, in the chapel of his relics, to focus on the cost of his witness and the, as yet, unfulfilled, reconversion of our land to the Catholic Faith.

The second was rather more earthly and abrupt. After a rather depressing trawl through the tired retailing area of the town we arrived at the impressive war memorial in the Town Square. In its shadow, scarcely noticeable, is a tiny square of granite, about A4 size, containing the basic facts of the life and death of a martyr for Christ. In the language of the time, an enemy of the State and an agent of a hostile foreign power - the Pope.

Mayne had given up a comfortable Anglican Rectory to be schooled abroad and return in hiding to assure the faithful of valid sacraments. For this privilege he was prepared to die a hideous death – hung, drawn and quartered here on this very spot. From a worldly point of view - MAD.

I did what I always do at holy sites, I knelt. My prayer was one of thanksgiving for the saint's witness and of asking for his prayers for those who, at far less cost, still work his mission field.

There was a lot of loud screaming behind me. When I finally stood up, it was to see a corpulent young woman with multi-coloured hair looking at me and repeatedly shouting the single word – 'MAD'.

Contrary to her intention, her accolade simply confirmed that I was, for all my failures, in good company. The demons always bear witness.

I reflected also on what Mayne would have made of the state of things now – in which the land has lapsed into a secular coma and the Pope himself prays with a King, who would be disqualified from that office were he dare to be a Catholic, and then cheerily welcomes the latest heretical usurper to the seat of Augustine. These are indeed strange times.

It is, you might justly argue, better than burning each other or spilling the entrails of the tortured in our shopping malls. But it also masks a religious indifference which takes all urgency out of mission and reduces our witness to a flabby and dishonest Universalism – 'Everyone is going to Heaven' -the oh so beguiling demonic deceit and recipe for spiritual inertia.

If this were true then Jesus would be a liar, the Church an affiliation of fools and the Cross merely an elaborate and masochistic exercise in vanity and exhibitionism.

St Peter, our first Pope, in his letter this morning, commends our suffering for our Christian Faith and witness to the unique saving power of Christ. We need not look for martyrdom. If we are faithful it will find us.

The world of the early church martyrs bears little relation to our experience here. In the comfortable agnostic West the modern Church plays a kind of soft-shoe shuffle with the powers, from Marxism to Mohammedanism, competing for her once upon a time supremacy.

In the wake of the Council, it is not difficult to extract from the inter-faith document, *Nostra Aetate*, a kind of cheerful acceptance of gradations of truth which has rapidly led to an indifferentism – the ‘many roads up the same mountain, many ways to God’ mantra – and a consequent sapping of all energy for mission.

This is, of course, far from the case in places like Nigeria where faithful witness is persecuted and punished by the perverse brutality of the militant Islamist movements. Mission is met by ferocity and violence.

For our society, mission is almost a quaint aberration .

We forget too easily both the primary purpose of the Church and the joy with which the apostles were prepared to suffer for the mission, for the salvation of souls. We struggle to share their perspective which is that of eternity In contrast we are all too often otherwise obsessed with making comfortable our limited and mortal span.

Yet our mission is no different from theirs.

If it is then there is something very wrong with ours.

If we are to retain our claim to being the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church then we must be truly APOSTOLIC – sent out, by Christ Jesus Our Lord, to preach that one eternal and immutable Gospel of salvation,

whatever the cost. What we seek is to bring people home to the true Church, to the valid sacraments of the Faith, to the knowledge of Christ and the genuine hope of Heaven. We need to know urgently what mission for our time looks like and spend some regular time in prayer asking the Lord to make clear our part in it and alerting us to the opportunities for witness in our daily round. We might do worse than to begin at that little square of granite which commemorates the divine madness of the martyr and ask for his prayers.

St Cuthbert Mayne.....pray for us.