

Remembering Mother Vincent Whitty



Mother Vincent led the Sisters of Mercy to Brisbane in 1861. Her 200th birthday, 1 March, is a great time to celebrate the gifts she brought to Australia and the contribution of religious orders to our nation.

Ellen Whitty entered the Sisters of Mercy in Baggott Street on 15 January 1839 and received the habit and the name Mary Vincent on 23 July 1839. Sr Mary Vincent had received her preparation for profession (19 August 1841) from Catherine McAuley herself. ... Catherine's farewell prediction to SM Vincent was that she would 'accomplish much for God's kingdom'. (Hetherington & Smoothy, 2011, p.7).

Mother Vincent's time with Catherine McAuley, especially during the final months of her life, allowed her to be immersed in Catherine's vision. All of that knowledge, wisdom and faith was then shared in Australia.

As Reverend Mother, Novice Mistress and missionary foundress, Mother Vincent accomplished amazing things and was an example to those who followed her.

In 1860 Mother Vincent and four other Sisters were invited by Bishop James Quinn to become the first women religious in the newly formed Diocese of Queensland.

Schools were established by Bishop O'Quinn and Mother Vincent under the auspices of the order, and the Nudgee and Stanwell orphanages are the out-growths of Mother Vincent's enthusiastic work years ago. The later and crowning joy of her life was to witness the establishment of the Magdalen Asylum at Lutwyche.

An obituary written by a prominent layman in a Brisbane newspaper of the time of her death reads, "Her love for the sick, the poor, the outcast knew no limit, whilst her love for the children found expression in her last words to her beloved spiritual daughters, whom she trained to a life similar to her own, 'Give my love to the children.' Mother Vincent was full of ideas for the amelioration of the poor, and with a calmness befitting her character she would speak of the works she would like to see built up in this city before her death. Her beauty of character, her sweetness, her tenderness are known to thousands in Queensland."

Letters written after her death in 1892 speak of her as a second foundress, revered, loved and esteemed across the Mercy world; of her kindly example; of the directness and simplicity of her prayer; of her affectionate welcome to all who came for advice or comfort; of her calm and peaceful demeanour belying an energy for all things related to ministry and mission.

In our current political landscape where migrants and refugees are not always welcome, it is good to remember and to reflect on the fact that many of our institutions and organisations were built on the migrants who came and the gifts they shared.

References:

- Hetherington, A. & Smoothy, P. (Compiled and Eds). (2011) Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty. St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, goo.gl/MS7CQc, goo.gl/GyPQgQ (Freeman's Journal (Sydney), 19 March 1892, p 18), goo.gl/dpyR6c

REFLECTION

Pause for a moment to reflect on how migrants like Mother Vincent Whitty have contributed to your ministry, community and your nation.