

Homily – St Brendan’s Day

When it comes to matters of design, I normally leave such things to the experts. When I met recently with Carol and Trish to look at the various designs to decorate the candles for St Brendan’s Day, I was fairly insistent on a particular image. At her creative best, Trish had found about 10 possible designs for the candle. But I insisted on a particular image for a particular reason. All the others had St Brendan on his own; this one shows a boat of disciples, followers and fellow missionaries of St Brendan working in the name of God to bring Good News to people in new lands. It’s an image about a journey, an adventure and a mission filled with faith, trust and courage.

While the missionary endeavours of St Brendan happened almost 1,500 years ago, the image of a group of disciples in the boat is a wonderful image that describes our parish, this feast-day, our vocation and our calling to be disciples of the Lord in this time and place. The example of St Brendan gives us courage, gives us daring, gives us vision and strengthens us in our common mission of witness, prayer and service. Today’s feast of the Ascension is normally associated with Jesus rising to heaven and disappearing from his disciples. On the surface, it looks like a feast of sadness, fear and hopelessness. But Jesus gives his disciples a commission to go out and bring Good News, he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit which is given to them at Pentecost, Jesus promises to be with his Church in all the ups and downs that await them.

That same sense of vision and energy was given to the first band of parishioners in 1891 when this parish began. Over on the site where the hall and kindergarten now stand, a new parish priest and a small group of loyal parishioners gathered to pray and dream. Melbourne was an expanding city, Catholic education demanded the provision of new schools and the first priests and people began with very little. But with great faith and vision, just like we hear about in the Acts of the Apostles, just like St Brendan did 1,500 years ago, they committed themselves to the task to build and create a community of faith. We are the recipients of this. I have often said, and I repeat it again, that we stand on the shoulders of giants. Now it is our turn to go forward, to serve and witness with that same level of faith, energy, vision and commitment. Our lives today are very different to the early disciples and the life of St

Brendan. But we are in the boat together, in Baptism we have received the gift and call of faith, today we will together renew our baptismal commitment and we are mindful of the rich diversity of cultures, languages and peoples who have made St Brendan's their home over many, many years. United in God; united in one faith.

From Easter Sunday, we have been reading from the Acts of the Apostles. It strikes me that this early band of disciples set out with very little. And yet they were filled with an abundance of confidence, a great spirit of joy in their hearts, a powerful sense of unity and purpose in their mission, in their sense of prayer, in their care for the poor and needy, in their desire to spread the good news. St Brendan also was filled with this missionary energy and sense of adventure to travel, to undertake a sometimes dangerous journey, but to do so with complete confidence and the knowledge that he was simply doing the will of God. These are the same characteristics demonstrated by our early pioneers here at St Brendan – a wonderful sense of confidence, a powerful sense of mission, a desire to build a community of faith and to spread the Good News.

Today we are conscious of the great gift of faith given to us in Baptism. We are conscious and proud of our past, we are grateful to God for the commitment of our pioneers and those who have gone before us and, like St Brendan, we set sail into the future trusting in God's providence and love to guide us always. As the parish prepares to celebrate its 125th anniversary next year, we are conscious that we are part of a long story of faith, and that our task now is to build for the future, to be in the boat together on that journey that enabled St Brendan to bring the Good News. In our local community, in our families, in our formation of the young, in our lives of prayer, service and witness, we are called to be disciples of Good News and to celebrate with joy the gift of faith given to us in Baptism. The risen Lord promised to be with his disciples. The risen Lord was with St Brendan in his many perilous journeys. The risen Lord was with our first pioneers 125 years ago as they faced the challenges of their day. The risen Lord is present to us in this celebration and into our future. 'Sailor of God, Brendan, Man of the sea. Guide timid footsteps, in this land young and free'.