

Jubilee 50 Years Fr Patrick Cassidy PP Gympie - 2 July 2017

Fr Pat may not remember... I was going to be his first assistant priest. It was 1983 – Pat was assistant priest, and then Administrator of Booval as the PP was retiring... and the thought was that he would become PP. Hence, two weeks before ordination, I received word from the Archbishop that I would be appointed to Booval. One week later, I received an anxious phone call from the AB to say that everything had changed, Fr Pat would remain at Booval and that I would be appointed elsewhere... but he didn't know where at that stage! Of course, all of this points to the fact that Fr Pat would know so well, and that I have come to appreciate in my 34 years since ordination, that you don't make too many plans in the priesthood as they are likely to be changed quickly and unexpectedly. In March this year, I had just finished overseeing the building and dedication of the new Burleigh Heads church, and thinking to myself that now I would have the chance to catch my breath and finish a few projects that had been neglected throughout the arduous task of building. NO Ken, ten days after the Dedication, the Nuncio phoned me to say that the Pope has other ideas!

Patrick Cassidy knew this aspect of being ready for change right from the beginning of his call to ministry. He entered the seminary in Feb 1961 and within a year, the church was turned to face new directions as Pope Saint John XXIII, called the ecumenical council – Vatican II, that would change any of the preconceived ideas of what his priesthood might look like. Whatever of those somewhat exciting years of seminary and the emerging of a different liturgical style, then to ordination and appointments in both city and country, Fr Pat has learned the need to be flexible and to be ever ready to accept both the challenge and change that inevitability follows the disciple of the Lord.

So we come to this moment of recalling 50 years of ordained ministry of Patrick Cassidy as a priest. Ordination anniversaries, like any anniversary of birth or marriage or some milestone, brings with it reflection, thankfulness and pondering of the future. Placed within the ways of faith, there is certain pattern to this reflection that takes us to the very heart of why one says yes to God in the first place.

It always starts with **call**. That always leads us back to our baptism – as St Paul reminded us today in our second reading – that we were baptised so that we **might live a new life**. None of us are here today but for our baptism. It was the beginning, the first call to know Christ and to live life with him. Fr Pat has heard a particular call through living out his baptismal calling – the call to know Christ through ordained ministry and to announce the call of Jesus to others. In the mystery of life, we all must know the depth of that calling of Jesus, because once heard, it changes lives forever. Priests spend their lives in trying to help people appreciate this calling and to understand its depth. In a Golden Jubilee celebration, one can only look back and wonder at the mystery of God at work when he calls not only the priest, but all those who have shared in the mission of the priest to experience and know the call of God.

The *call* always leads to the **cross**. With the words of today's Gospel ringing in our ears... *anyone who does not take up [his or her] cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me*, we can never back away from the mystery of the Lord's cross – his death and resurrection. While we all know the cross in some shape or form in life, priests not only see it as it looms in the lives of their people, but they too know its power and pathways in life. One way is always that pain where they know they have not been as generous as they could have been in their ministry. When insensitivity has characterised a situation and people have felt let down by words or decisions. When understanding has been lacking and pain has been caused to others. Every priest is ever aware that I 'could have done better' or I 'missed that opportunity'. But in the midst of knowing the cross and being aware of its power to heal and renew, a priest stands in awe of the God who continually renews and strengthens the sinner to experience new possibilities. We follow in the footsteps of the one whose pathway is always life giving.

The *call* and *cross* always lead to **communion** and community. Here the priest lives out his life in the midst of the people that Christ has entrusted to him. Here he unites them in the common purpose of knowing and loving God and living in communion with one another as followers of the same Christ. The people of Gympie [and all the other parishes that Pat has served] have benefited greatly from the work of the Holy Spirit to unite and keep together the followers of Jesus. Especially through the celebration of the Eucharist, the sharing of God's Word and being nourished on his Body and Blood, food for the life of the world, the priest becomes the point of unity in Christ as people are gathered into this awesome mystery.

Today we marvel at the workings of our gracious God through the ordained ministry of Pat Cassidy for 50 years and we are deeply grateful to God. We see a living sign of Christ's call, of someone who knows the cross and finds life through it, a one who fosters the communion of our faith and loves the people, the communities that have been entrusted to his pastoral care.

I would like to read a few words of Fr Frank Lourigan that he said about Fr Pat at the priests jubilee celebration last Thursday:

Pat was ever the strong silent man. Strong as an ox at football and farm – an action man. I recall one day Pat returning from the seminary farm with a giant fence post on each shoulder tossing them to the ground as though they were 3ft pieces of pine. Pat hailed from country Nanango, a parish he pastored later, by then joined to Kingaroy. His care for country people continued into these last dozen years as PP of Gympie and Dean of North Country,

Pat is a man of deep spirituality – of much thought before he speaks. Pipe in hand, careful stoking of the fire – then his words of wisdom!

Pat has served: Mt Gravatt, Darra, Gayndah, Gympie (assistant & Parish Priest), Booval, Inala (Team ministry), Kingston/Marsden, Nanango/Kingaroy.

He said that Fr Pat and his classmate Fr Frank O'Dea have been breathing life into the Brisbane and indeed Queensland church for 50 years! This today we applaud.

Yes indeed we do this, and we marvel at the mission of one man in the service of God's people over 50 years. But above all we marvel at the hand of God at work through him, because when all is said and done: it's all God's work, and we are merely the instruments of God's grace at work.

May our prayer for Fr Pat be those same words announced by the bishop at his Ordination: *May God who has begun this good work in you bring it to fulfilment.* [Ordination Rite]