

Homily for the Funeral of the late Bishop Patrick Dougherty

Cathedral of St Michael and St John, Bathurst

8 September 2010

"Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by ..."

We chose this gospel today for two reasons.

First, Mary is in it. Bishop Dougherty would have been pleased to think that his funeral would be on this Feast of Our Lady's Birthday. He had a deep, authentic devotion to Mary and an understanding of her part in the story of our salvation. He heard the words of Jesus to Mary – *Behold your son* – and to the beloved disciple – *Behold your mother* – as words for the whole People of God and for him.

Second, this gospel is the source of Patrick Dougherty's episcopal motto – *Iuxta Crucem Discipulus*. "At the Cross...the disciple." He lived this as a Christian, and as a bishop.

Instinctively, we shy away from the Cross. From a distance, it looks like only suffering and loss. But if faith draws us near and if faith enables us to say yes, then we discover that the Cross is not the last word of death, but the entry to life.

Bishop Dougherty died as he had lived: saying yes to the one on the Cross: saying yes with him. He had discovered in both the dramatic and the everyday moments of his life that even when his yes was soft and frightened, it could be caught up, carried and strengthened in the great yes of Jesus.

"Every promise of God finds its Yes in Christ Jesus and through him the final Amen is said, to the glory of God."

Patrick Dougherty lived and ministered as a disciple at the Cross. That was the key to his integrity, and to his compassion. It enabled him to walk on "in joyful hope" even when difficulties seemed overwhelming, even when he was misunderstood and falsely criticised. It is why we who

came to know him, even if our dealings were sometimes troubled, still can say "he loved us."

As a bishop, much of his ministry was inevitably public. But he also continued a quiet and often unseen pastoral care especially among the poor and suffering. We can only guess at how many lives he touched in that way. We can be sure that he saw in them the face of Christ and found himself, in their presence, again and again, to be the disciple at the Cross.

Patrick Dougherty published two books. The first, in 1958, was a study of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The second, in 1963, was the life of Venerable Mary Potter, who founded the Little Company of Mary. These books shed light on their author, as well as on their subjects.

Here is a passage from "Mother Mary Potter," describing the unhappy marriage of Mary's parents:

"In the home where Christ was forgotten and where Christian meekness and humility had neither access nor influence, there were two rulers, each seeking predominance, to the slow but certain death of mutual understanding, peace and unity. Selfishness led to dissension, and both to profound unhappiness."

The confident wholeness of the Christian vision articulated in that passage, the sympathy for human potential thwarted by sin, are characteristic of Pat. And in his diagnosis of how relationships go wrong, we see the grounded, practical spirituality by which he lived. As father of the diocesan family, Bishop Dougherty tried never to forget Christ, even if others did; and always to be the one, even if others wouldn't, through whom Christian meekness and humility had access and influence.

Many of you would know John O'Brien's poem "Vale Father Pat." Our Bishop Pat was not really like the rough and ready Irishman depicted there. But there was one line I often thought of when I visited and saw the table by his chair:

"I see...handy where he sat,

The well-thumbed breviary that warmed the heart of Father Pat.”

You can see Bishop Pat’s well-thumbed breviary on his coffin now. He prayed it every day for the Church and the world. He prayed it for us. Each night, before bed, he prayed Compline, with the beautiful Canticle of Simeon.

“At last, all powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise...”

+*Michael McKenna*
Bishop of Bathurst