

MONSIGNOR VINCE CASEY

1907-2010

Applying a rather well used Australian saying, I feel that giving this homily at Vince Casey's Requiem is like coming in to bat after Bradman. Especially in this church, where for over thirty years he spoke so powerfully about Faith, about Life, about Death.

Vince was born, and would have been baptized, in 1907, when James Murray was Bishop of Maitland. James Murray was our first resident Bishop. He would have been confirmed, and accepted as a student for the Priesthood, by PV Dwyer – our second resident Bishop. He was ordained by Edmund Gleeson and was an assistant priest and parish priest in Edmund Gleeson's time.

Vince was a Parish Priest, and a Vicar General, and became a Domestic Prelate when John Toohey was Bishop. He was also a Vicar General, and continued as a Parish Priest, until retirement in 1987, when Leo Clarke was Bishop.

He lived in retirement, but continued to exercise his ministry, in the fifteen years Michael Malone has been here.

So Vince Casey's life, and journey in Faith and Ministry, have been linked with the six resident Bishops of the Diocese!

Today we gather to pay tribute to, and pray for, this remarkable man who has meant so much to us.

In heaven, we believe we will be with God, and our loved ones. The first reading tells us we will also be in the company of many others: "A huge number impossible to count of people from every nation, race, tribe and language." John Shea said that the kingdom of heaven is open to all who are willing to sit down with all, who have the kind of heart which will share life and a table with anyone. To enjoy heaven we will need a heart that has been stretched by love. Vince Casey will be at home in heaven.

In the second reading Paul says he is not trying for perfection by his own efforts, but through Faith in Christ, and the power of his Resurrection. That's a lesson we are more likely to learn in the second half of life. I'm sure it's a lesson Vince Casey learnt.

Ronald Rolheiser wrote that we're never as good as we'd like to be, never as stable as we'd like to be, never as much at peace as we'd like to be. And we won't overcome our inadequacies simply by willpower. We need the power of the risen Christ in our lives. Paul tells us that in the second reading.

And the Gospel – Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me.” I believe that when Vince proclaimed the Word of God in this place, that was his main message: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me.”

In the second reading Paul uses an image from the athletics field. “I have not yet won, I am still running, I am racing for the finish, for the prize which God calls us to receive in Christ Jesus.”

Vince was a sportsman of many parts. A good cricketer, an A grade golfer for over thirty years, a player in all four football codes, a representative in the Manly-Springwood League games, handball champion, good at billiards etc, but I think his longest suit was athletics. In running I’d say he was GPS championship standard at least.

And of course, there was his love of horse racing. I don’t know if he was a successful punter, but working a computer at Broadmeadow, at 100 years of age, to get the best odds, was surely remarkable. We thank the NJC for providing the venue when we celebrated his 100th birthday.

Vince loved sport – and he loved the opportunity it gave him to meet many people whom he would never have otherwise met.

Other points:

- A man of integrity
- Of principle
- Of wisdom and balance
- A wonderful, compassionate confessor
- A confidant; someone said “I had absolute trust in him”, and he appreciated the trust people had in him.
- A great friend: In Merriwa days if he was going away he would call in on someone who was doing it tough and ask, “Will you be OK?” In Martin de Porres days, in a wheelchair, at 101, he visited a dear friend in hospital.
- A sensitive man: he hated to think he had hurt anyone.
- A great sense of humour.
- A special life-long respect and support for, and friendship with, the Religious Sisters. In early days especially he gave help which may not have been available anywhere else.

And perhaps greatest of all, the love he had for his people.

He was a shrewd judge of people. From Fr Barry Tunks:

Barry had organised some adjustments to this church to cater for post-Vatican II liturgical changes.

Amongst other things, he removed the altar rails. Vince insisted they go back.

Later on, Bishop Toohey made his inspection and was generally well pleased, but he said to Vince, "Get rid of the altar rails, they're not necessary."

"Yes, my Lord."

Afterwards Barry said to Vince, "Well, I did tell you the altar rails were not necessary."

"I knew that," said Vince.

"Then why did you tell me to put them back?"

"Well," said Vince, - in reference to Bishop Toohey - "No matter what it is, he will always make some change to your plans. And I knew he would tell me to get rid of the altar rails. Better to get the change you want than a change you might not want!"

We are a very human church. Vince Casey knew and loved that.

Just one other point about the changes: Barry wanted to remove a side altar. It served no purpose, nevertheless Vince wanted it to stay. Two days later he told Barry, "You can take that altar away." Much later on, Barry found out that the altar had been donated by Vince in memory of his father and mother. He was a big man.

Devotion to 'The Little Flower'

He asked for help especially on two occasions: when he was ill for three months with scarlet fever and yellow jaundice, and when he was terrified at the prospect of giving his first sermon – in the seminary and with his fellow students as his congregation. He survived, and later on kept his promise to the Little Flower that if he ever built a church it would be dedicated to her.

In 2002 he was planning his funeral with Adrian Quain. Adrian added up the various figures and gave the total cost. "That's wrong," said Vince, and gave an alternative total. Vince was sitting on the other side of the table from Adrian and adding up the figures that were upside down to him. And Vince's total was right. He was 94 years old.

Then there was his amazing memory, his love of reading his favourite poems. There are tapes of his reciting some of the favourites. Unfortunately no time for details, and no time to speak in detail about the way he prayed – or the respect that we priests had for him. Fr Gerard Mackie told me a couple of moving stories – check them out with Gerard.

Did he have frailties?

Of course he did.

Let's say, for example, you didn't see Vince at his best if he was kept waiting to be served a meal at a social function.

And he was afraid of dying – which with typical honesty he admitted.

But then the fear passed and he died gently and peacefully.

We are compassionate to whatever frailties he may have had, because he was compassionate to us.

And of course his God will be full of compassion.

As we pray for Vince, we ask him to pray for us, and for our church.

We thank those who cared for him – Maureen, for your decades of love and care; and Nora, and Kay, and the family, the staff at Martin de Porres; Barry, for your pastoral care, and many others I'm sure.

Just five lines from his CJ Dennis signature piece:

“And ever it has taught me, day be day,
the one same lesson in the same ole way.
Look for yer profits in the ‘earts of friends
For ‘ating never paid no dividends,
Livin’ and lovin’ and learnin’ to forgive.”

Finally, this letter:

Dear Vince

I am deeply grateful to you for all you did to make my stay at New Lambton such a happy one. I can look back on these last three years and find nothing that it would be better to forget. No doubt I must have tried your patience pretty hard on many occasions, but you never showed it. You were always the same from one day to the next. And not just tolerant; you were always considerate and generous and ready to put yourself out if you could do me a good turn. God bless you Vince!

(from David Gooud)

Yes – God bless you Vince – and may you rest in peace. Amen.

Fr James Saunders

St Therese's Church New Lambton

16 April 2010