

# HOMILY FOR THE MASS AT ST ALIPIUS' BALLARAT EAST

on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of St Alipius Church

6.00pm Vigil Mass Saturday December 14th (3rd Sunday of Advent)

In the centre of Dublin there's a beautiful piece of street art, or graffiti as some might call it, that says 'those who hold the power write the history, while those who struggle write the songs'<sup>1</sup>. Irish music, poetry and storytelling is embedded in their culture, and it reveals their struggle.

The anniversaries that we acknowledge, invite our reflections on struggle, not power and in the gathering of the stories that have marked our preparations that are displayed through photos, articles, and digital recordings of some of the elders of our communities, they enable us to identify the songlines of St Alipius.

In first nations cultures, the songlines are the dreaming tracks, a type of 'memory code' where each song is part of a larger story. This advent as we prepare yet again to receive Christ into our lives with hope and joy, with a uniquely incarnational faith, Emmanuel, God with us, one with us so completely that the stories themselves of St Alipius become an occasion for the traces of God to be revealed amongst us, the Word made flesh, born of Mary, fully human, fully divine.

»Nostalgia.is.the.close.relative.of.history?which.is.a.parent.of.communal.identity; Not only are we subjective and selective about the events of the present, but we're also even more so about the past. Our history, our story helps us to understand our communal identity. Stories of struggle are the songlines of St Alipius. At the ceremony in 1873 to lay the foundation of this Church, Fr Corbett who gave the occasional sermon, spoke of the struggle of the forefathers (and mothers) to preserve the faith<sup>2</sup>.

To that struggle we might also recognise some of the many struggles in our story – some are unique to St Alipius while many are more universal. In addition to the many very personal struggles of each one of us, allow me to name just a few that must include

- The struggles of the Wathawurrung - the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather, the struggle for reconciliation continues
- The struggles of those who came in the 1850's with hopes of discovering gold
- the Chinese who disembarked in Robe and trekked here across the plains
- the events the of monster meeting at Bakery Hill of miners seeking justice in the face of oppressive licences and the subsequent Eureka rebellion
- the Irish who migrated to flee from the great hunger
- struggle has been a constant in the story of Catholic education, the early history here at times reads like something from the wild west<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Those Who Suffer Write the Songs' – Remembering Frank Harte (1933-2005)

[Frank Harte | Singer | Obituary | Mick Moloney | 'Those Who Suffer Write the Songs' – Remembering Frank Harte \(1933-2005\) | The Journal of Music | Music in Ireland: News, Reviews and Opinion](#)

<sup>2</sup> St Alipius History Committee, *People of Golden Faith. Windows into St Alipius, A History, 1953 – 1993* (Bendigo: Richard Cambridge Printers, 1993), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Jill Blee, *From the Murray to the Sea. The History of Catholic Education in the Ballarat Diocese*, (Ballarat: Indra Publishing: 2004), 46-47.

- the struggles for government funding for Catholic schools from the 1870's when state aid was withdrawn and the ongoing challenges of staffing and funding.
- the struggle for the Church in the world when faced with the perceived threat of modernism
- the songlines of struggle can be identified in the waves of migration following the upheaval of the two World Wars and the Great Depression
- the struggles to receive and implement the Second Vatican Council with its hopes of renewal and refounding and the affirmation of the dignity of all the baptised as the People of God
- the struggle of child sexual abuse in the Church and its continuing impacts
- we continue to struggle for an identity in the midst of increasing religious pluralism and secularism
- the ongoing struggle for women in the Church

Struggle is part of the DNA of St Alipius and in the context of this advent, our Gospel asks 'what must we do?' What does it truly mean to be disciples of Jesus Christ in this time and place as the community of St Alipius Parish?

This 3rd Sunday of Advent we hear the prophet Zephaniah - calling through the slums of Jerusalem to a struggling people to celebrate their real fortune. Like Paul, in his struggle as a prisoner in his cell awaiting his approaching death and writing letters that tell people to be happy. Like John the Baptist, a wilderness voice in occupied territory announcing Good News.

There can be no joy for us as long as the things we do are different from the things we say we believe. To face our own integrity issues requires considerable moral courage. We need to listen to the prophets of our time, calling us to face up to ourselves before God, inviting us to authentic lives that ring true, that pass the pub test. This will take us into areas of discomfort, but heeding the challenge of Pope Francis for the Church to not close in on itself, but to continue pioneering, reaching out to the peripheries<sup>4</sup>, being open and present in and to the world through the disruptive and at times disturbing power of the Holy Spirit – to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

May God who has begun the good work in us over all of these years and through all of these struggles, continue to bring it to fulfillment.

Fr Justin Driscoll (Parish Priest)

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 20.