

Straight from the Religious Education Coordinator's Desk.

Upcoming Events:

This Week: Wednesday, 24th May 9.30am Whole School Mass– Feast of Mary Help of Christians
(Patroness of Australia)

First Eucharist Enrolment: During the Masses last weekend, the children from Year 3 preparing for the Sacrament of the Eucharist were presented by their parents and enrolled in the preparation programme. Please keep these young people and their families in your prayers as they prepare to receive Jesus for the first time in Holy Communion.

Mary Help of Christians – Patroness of Australia



The **Feast Day of Our Lady, Mary Help of Christians** has been celebrated in Australia since 1844, however the title and feast has a long history.

Our Lady has been invoked under the title **Auxilium Christianorum or Help of Christians** since at least the sixteenth century. After the battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571, at which a Turkish fleet was defeated by a Christian fleet, Pope Pius V, who had previously called upon Catholics to invoke Mary's assistance so that the Turkish threat may be averted, inserted the title "Help of Christians" into the Litany of Our Lady as he believed that the threat of invasion had been averted through Mary's intercession.

Our Lady was again to be invoked under the title Help of Christians early in the nineteenth century. Pius VII was elected to the Papacy in 1800, soon after Napoleon had seized power in France. Napoleon gaoled Pope Pius VII and kept him prisoner at Fontainebleau. The Holy Father (Pope Pius VII) vowed to God that if he were restored to the Roman See, he would institute a special feast in honour of Mary. The military eventually forced Bonaparte to release the Pope and on 24 May, 1814 Pius VII returned in triumph to Rome.

Pius VII attributed his eventual freedom in 1814 to Our Lady Help of Christians and decreed that the feast be celebrated on the anniversary of the day upon which he re-entered Rome, 24 May.

The Church has traditionally focussed on two aspects of Our Lady's help on this feast day. Firstly, the Church focuses in this feast upon the role of Our Lady's intercession in the fight against sin in the life of a believer. Secondly, the Church has focussed upon Our Lady as one who assists Christians as a community, through her intercession, in fighting against anti-Christian forces.

Mary Help of Christians and Australia

In 1844, Mary, under the title of Our Lady Help of Christians was chosen as the patroness of Australia at the First Provincial Synod of Sydney. The infant church in Australia had a special reason for turning to Mary.

In the early years of the colony during convict times, no priests were sent to the colony and Mass was not allowed except for one brief year until 1820. It was largely the praying of the Rosary by the Catholic community in those early days that kept the faith alive. It was precisely during the priestless period (1802-1819) that Pius VII returned to Rome from exile and instituted the feast on the 24th May.

The Australian Catholic community remained faithful to Mary and it was in 1844 at the first Provincial Synod of Sydney, the Bishops of Australia decided to place Australia under the special patronage of 'Our Lady Help of Christians. Australia was the first nation to choose Mary the mother of Jesus under the title, 'Mary Help of Christians' as principle Patroness.

Australia also became the first country to have a cathedral dedicated in Our Lady, Mary's name. St Mary's Cathedral, Australia's mother in Sydney was dedicated in her honour by the Irish pioneer priest, Fr John Therry who arrived in Sydney in 1820. The Lady Altar at Saint Mary's Cathedral, Sydney with it's statue of Mary Help of Christians, was erected as a memorial to Father Therry's name.

In the opening prayer of the Mass for Our Lady Help of Christians, the Church prays that through Our Lady's intercession God will "grant wisdom to our leaders and integrity to our citizens", so that , "under her protection, Australia may be granted, harmony, justice and peace". The Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians is an opportunity for Australians to thank God for His blessings they enjoy.

Our Lady Help of Christians – pray for us.