

In today's Gospel we have heard a well-known parable that each one of us has had the opportunity to reflect on many times.

It is about relationships and connections.

After some time the prodigal son came to his senses, recognised his loss of self-respect and took steps to remedy the situation.

He apologised, humbly said he didn't feel worthy to be called son, acknowledged what he had done was wrong and took steps to restore his relationship and connections with his father.

The 4th Sunday in Lent reminds us that God, like the father in the story is always patiently waiting for us. He is a God of Mercy and Compassion.

Each one here knows of at least one time in our life where we have done something that we are not proud of and that we sincerely regret. This parable shows us a way forward.

So today we might think about with whom and what relationship and connection we might be humble enough to take action about and restore.

Today's 90 years celebration is about relationships and connections.

On the 29th April 1929 school officially commenced here at St Brigid's. It was spoken of as St Brigid's in the Hills. 36 Boarders and 3 day pupils bumped their way up Lesmurdie Hill on the back of a shearer's truck along with two cars transporting the Sisters and baby boarders from the West Perth foundation which was also called St Brigid's. It was probably thought of as an extension of that school in the minds of those early Sisters. We have all heard the story of how 53 acres of land and the buildings on the property were bought for the sum of twelve thousand pounds. This was described by Mrs Sanderson, the neighbour, as a real Catholic bargain. No one seems to know where that 12,000 pounds came from. What vision and foresight those early Sisters had and what great women they were hard-working, dedicated human beings each of them. They taught all day, ran the business of the College and looked after the boarders when school finished. The Sisters who were called Ley-sisters did all the cooking, washing, ironing and much more. There were usually only 4 of them. Right into the 1960's and early 70's they were up and in the kitchen at 5.00am to make sure the stoves were fired up and that breakfast would be ready etc. They lived a full religious community life being expected to remain up for night prayers at 9.00p.m. though I am sure they were what people would call 'bone-tired'. To me they were heroic women who added an extraordinary amount to the life of each person here.

I also recall people like Ciesto, Mrs Marchella, Mr Conti and many other people who worked with the Sisters.

Unfortunately when we think about early days at St Brigid's we often recall standing under the clock or missing out on something. Not too often do we hear how those sisters cooked, cleaned and cared for us as well as making sure we had a good education. They also smiled warmly

and listened to the stories and gave some comfort to girls who had the chance to be with them on their charges etc. The boarders worked hard and certainly added to the fortune of this college.

We will remember the Sisters who taught in the College over the years. Their days were long and their care was extraordinary. Each of them had/ and shared/ their particular gift or talent. They inspired many of us to be more vigilant about the environment, to love learning, to be compassionate, to treat one another with respect and as decent human beings, to listen to each other without judgment. The students did learn about belonging to a community outside the family and about being accepted and valued, and learnt to accept and value others. They may not have got the message at the time but many have remembered the lessons later in life. The Sisters, along with the parents knew girls needed a good education and that was what they were passionate about. They recognised that many of the boarders came from hard working country families who wanted a good education for their daughters. The Sisters were inspired by Catherine McAuley who said “no work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor than the careful instruction of women, since, whatever be their station they were destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence”.

And that hasn't change.

The Sisters are no longer a daily presence in the College but all who work here definitely carry the spirit of Mercy in their hearts and minds. They believe what Catherine said about women's example and advice always having an influence, and those Principals who have led the

College since the Sisters handed over the leadership to Mrs Mary Retel, Dr Amelia Toffoli and now Mrs Carmen Cox are committed to Mercy. Mrs Retel and Dr Toffoli are certainly proud Mercy tradition people and were dedicated to the values of Mercy and the living of the College motto. Mrs Cox in her short time is quickly growing into that role and is loving her job. In my mind and heart the ingredient to being a successful Principal is to love your job and inspire all who work with you to love theirs.

Days like today can be a wonderful lift of each person's spirit. We meet up with people we haven't seen maybe since we left the College. We remember the good times and not so good times. However, the challenge for today is to remember the good times and what your education and life at St Brigid's has helped you to cope with. Today I think about the great sacrifices your parents made in sending you to the College: Not only what it cost in dollar or pound terms, and that was/ is significant, but also the relationships and nurturing that you both missed out on. Think of them with love and pray for them today.

Then think about those wonderful Sisters who worked so hard to establish this place. They certainly made great sacrifices both personally and physically. To bump up Lesmurdie Hill ninety years ago was, for some, a trip too far. But they did it and we are the beneficiaries.

I also think of the boarders in particular who left home in those early days. Three times a year they arrived at Lesmurdie and wore their uniform 7 days a week from the time they got out of bed in the morning until they went to bed again at night. There were certainly no

shorts and tank tops in those early days. Many girls suffered great home-sickness and for some of them Education and boarding school was a necessary evil yet they persevered. We think also of the day scholars, boys and girls, who added and still add so much personal style, friendship and simple healthy competition and life to each day.

So today is the day we give thanks for each of you. Your contribution to the life and spirit of St Brigid's is what has made it what it is. The Sisters of Mercy are grateful and proud of all that has been achieved, and never for one minute, do we forget that it was the wonderful spirit of those first Sisters and the many that followed, the students, families, staff and all connected with the College that has brought us to this day. It is also the Spirit of the God of Mercy and Catherine McAuley hovering over the place at all times.

Let us pray that the motto of the College will always remain in our hearts and minds. Virtue alone enobles. May the God of Mercy bless and protect you and all those you love in a special way today.

Joan Buckham rsm.