

I Have a Story Birthday of Mary

Homily given by the Most Reverend Francis P Carroll DD
Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
in Saint Christopher's Cathedral
on the occasion of the national launch of "I Have a Story"
8 September 2004

Tradition has given the names of Joachim and Anne as her parents. We presume she was welcomed with love and that her birth gave her parents great joy and happiness. They did not know of course what the future held; far less did they know the absolutely unique role that their daughter was to play in God's plan of salvation. Mary herself would give birth to a child who would literally and truly be God-with-us-Emmanuel.

Mary's child brought her great joy and happiness. Mary, more than any other mother, realized the great responsibility that had been given her. Surely too, Mary would have known some apprehension, some wondering and human misunderstanding about the future of her child. Her son was divine. Conceived in mystery and born in a stable because there was no room at the inn for him. She would soon hear the prophecy of Simeon, "*This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel- and your own soul, a sword will pierce.*"

Mary would always care for her child – her love never wavered, nor did her faith in God ever fail. She was to see him rejected by many, ultimately would stand beneath his Cross of suffering and share his pain and then to accept his broken and lifeless body into her arms as her own heart was broken. Even then, in the midst of darkness and sorrow, she knew the truth of St Paul's words. "We know that by turning everything to their good, God operates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose"

Every child is born unique with the priceless value of the human person. Normally parents know great joy and happiness and receive their child with love. They also know that a great responsibility has been given to them and along with their high hopes and expectations, there must be a level of apprehension about the future of their child.

Mary's hopes will be fulfilled, but many apprehensions and fears may also be realized.

Today we are welcoming people with disabilities and reflecting on their lot and experience. This includes all of us in various degrees, but for some, the disability is more notable and more onerous both to those with disabilities and to their parents and families.

This situation may mute something of the joy of new life. It certainly adds to the apprehension and concern about the future and can add an enormous weight of suffering even though, as it happens so often, it brings forth an even greater love that can only be admired and humbly wondered at for its strength and faithfulness.

The burdens that disability can bring to individuals and their families are sometimes made even more crushing by the lack of understanding, acceptance and support of the community. Even worse, many have known the pain of exclusion and rejection. The pain of this is even sharper when such neglect or rejection comes from those from whom people with disabilities, and their families, have every right to expect acceptance, support and Christian love.

I know there are many who have been deeply hurt and felt angered by their loved ones being overlooked, demeaned or rejected in different ways by the Church Community. This is where they had every right to expect support because we speak of the love of God and profess to keep alive the compassion of Christ. Today I wish to express regret for such unchristian behaviour, apologise to those who have experienced it and ask their pardon on behalf of the Church.

Today's launch is all about calling ourselves as the Christian Community in all its parts, to put aside any such practices and the attitudes that give rise to them. It's about making a fresh start in being Communities that respect the unique value of every person, include all in the life of the Community by welcoming the gifts of all and help liberate individuals and enrich the Community itself.

The Gospel describes Jesus human genealogy. The list represents a very human history. In the list of his ancestors, there are saints and sinners and everything in between. There were glorious achievements and ignominious failures. There was slavery and liberation, kindness and cruelty. Through it all, in spite of human failing and unfaithfulness, God's love and purpose remain faithful until God comes and lives among his people in the one who is Son of God and Son of Mary.

Let us ask the prayer of Mary as we seek to open our hearts and our Communities to receive Jesus as God-with-us by opening our hearts and Communities to receive with understanding, gratitude and love, every person of whatever state or condition, as we would Jesus himself. They are the ones God chose long ago and intended to become true images of his Son, so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers and sisters.