**Fr Peter Matheson - Homily**

**St Bede’s College Mass - 9 September, 2022**

Later, after communion, our principal, Ms Deb Frizza, will give a reflection on the feast of the Assumption. For these few minutes I want to largely focus on the gospel we have just heard, and the events associated with it.

At the beginning of 2019 I joined a pilgrimage to the Holy Lands as part of a sabbatical break, and it was one of the most enjoyable and educational couple of weeks I have ever experienced. It was organised as a Lasallian pilgrimage by Ms Ria Greene from here in the heart of St Bede’s College. She reminded all of us pilgrims at the start of the journey that *“A tourist travels through the land. A pilgrim lets the land travel through them.”*

Two special parts of the land associated with Mary that travelled through me were the little village of Ain Karin, a hill town in Judaea, where tradition declares this visitation of Mary to Elizabeth took place, and the now bustling city of Nazareth, where scripture tells us the visitation of the angel Gabriel to Mary occurred, inviting her to become the mother of the Lord.

At Ain Karin, when Mary enters Elizabeth’s home, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaps for joy. When Elizabeth tells Mary this, Mary then knows that the promise of the angel has been fulfilled. God is becoming flesh in her womb. And she bursts into a song of praise. In the meeting of these two women, in the gentle hospitality they exchange, we see the beginnings of the Christian community that will share and celebrate the hospitality of God.

Outside the modern chapel in Ain Karin commemorating the visitation, there is a courtyard surrounded by a high wall, and on that wall, in 100 or more ceramic plaques are the words of Mary’s song of praise written in 100 or more of the languages of the earth. Also, in that courtyard, an artist had used sheet metal to depict two life-size pregnant women meeting each other. We were travelling through the land, but here the land was starting to travel through us.

At the start of Mass Leighton acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin nation. Country is so important to them. They don’t own the country. The country owns them. It is part of their identity. Like pilgrims they let the land travel through them. When we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, we also acknowledge that this land is also part of our identity. It travels through us. Wherever we stand on this earth we stand on gift from the creating Word of God. And the stuff of our body is made from the stuff of this earth.

In Nazareth up in Galilee we visited the basilica of the Annunciation built over a small grotto deep under the two levels of the basilica. In that grotto the visit of the archangel Gabriel to the young Mary took place according to tradition, centuries old. There is a small altar in the grotto and on the front of the altar are the Latin words “Verbum caro hic factum est.” “The Word was made flesh here.” Once again this grotto, this cave, this land travelled through me like a bolt of lightning. The Word, the creating Word of God, became flesh - here.

Another possible translation of the Latin word “caro” is “meat.” The Word of God became meat here. It is a little more shocking. Do we look at a little baby and describe it as “meat”? It might be meat to an eagle, but to our eyes that little baby is so much more than “meat.” Its flesh is sculpted and shaped by spirit, and by all the love and dreams of those who brought it to birth. And when God brings something to birth, God’s dreams for that creation never die.

The dream that God had for this little baby born of Mary was summed up by St Paul in that first reading today. That child would never cease to exist. Death, as we humans see it, is seen differently by God. Jesus died on the cross. But in death the life of Jesus was changed, not ended. Christ is risen from the dead. In Christ all will be made alive, as St Paul said. But each in their proper turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. As Christ belonged to Mary as a little baby, and indeed as a boy, a young man, and a grown man, so she belongs to Christ. And Christ has brought her body and spirit into heaven, the second person to know the full mystery of resurrection.

Even though our belief in the Assumption of Mary was only officially defined just over 70 years ago, just before Elizabeth II was crowned, people of faith have believed this for centuries. The experiences that certain people have had of appearances of Mary, such as at Lourdes in France or Fatima in Portugal, attest to something of the mystery of the Assumption, and the belief of millions of believers over the last 1500 years at least.

Elizabeth told Mary in that little village of Ain Karin two thousand years ago: “Blessed are you who believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises in you!” And Mary in turn replies praising God who has done this amazing thing to her, the God who will continue to give life to all the lowly of the earth. “He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and lifted up the humble.” Those words sound strange today after hearing of the death of a much loved Monarch. Queen Elizabeth was not so much a mighty ruler, as a gentle humble servant of her people.

We are all much more than meat, more than flesh and blood, more than the stuff of this earth. God has planted spirit and dreams in all of us, a spirit that dreams of fullness of life in God’s kingdom, dreams that one day we will join God, like Mary, body and spirit, in God’s kingdom.

We are all pilgrims here. Like pilgrims we let the land travel through us, as our aboriginal brothers and sisters have done for millennia. The land is sacred to them. It is sacred to us. It is God’s gift for our earthly journey. We care for the land and the land cares for us. At the end of our earthly journey our bodies will die, and our flesh will become dust again, but our spirit that has let God’s dreams and God’s gift of the land travel through it, will discover that life is changed, not ended. Our risen bodies in God’s kingdom will be very different to what encloses and weighs down our spirit on earth. In heaven our bodies will become glorious and spiritual as St Paul also told the Corinthians, and they will never again be weighed down by the weight of dust.