

The Procession to conclude the Marian Year of 1954 CW DEC 16.

The eighth of December, 1954 saw the Catholics of Sydney expressing their devotion to the mother of God in that most typical and expressive of ways which they have always loved; namely the public procession. No fewer than eight thousand Catholics took part in the procession itself, a glorious candlelight affair, while forty thousand more looked on. Everyone was there to be found in the great procession: all the members of the Catholic sodalities and associations: the Catholic nurses, the St Vincent de Paul societies, the Holy Name Societies, the Theresian groups, Catholic university graduates in their academic dress, and following them the members of the religious orders. Rank upon rank of teaching brothers and sisters, all in the companies of their congregations. After them came the diocesan clergy in soutane and surplice and finally the beautiful bier carried by four laymen and wonderfully decorated with a profusion of flowers. Upon the bier was the statue of our Lady, and all eyes were fixed upon her. She was followed by Cardinal Gilroy and the two auxiliary bishops of Sydney, Bishops Lyons and Carroll. The procession was accompanied by the Rosary which was recited with Marian hymns by all present. Out the College St entrance the procession wound before encircling the Cathedral and ending before the great south door where a festive altar had been erected with a huge canopy in white and blue. There Cardinal Gilroy stopped and gave Benediction while the huge crowds knelt for the blessing. Spotlights focussed on the monstrance for added effect and all this against a backdrop of floral arrangements rarely seen in Australia. A cross of flowers rose high above the festive altar and the word "Maria" was picked out in red and white roses.

The whole day had been one given over to prayer. It had started at 10.30 that morning with a Mass in the Cathedral at which Monsignor Freeman (as he then was) preached and Cardinal Gilroy presided. All day the rosary was continuously recited by the Catholic groups of the Archdiocese before a special Holy hour and Benediction in the afternoon. Another Mass was offered in the evening at 7.30, this time said by Bishop Carroll, with Cardinal Gilroy again presiding. Meanwhile, the crowds had been gathering outside in patient expectation. It was at the end of this Mass that the procession began and Sydney's Catholics made a great demonstration of faith by the light of many thousands of candles while the warm evening breezes swirled around them.