

MEDIA RELEASE



Polding Centre
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000

1 May 2020

Archdiocese of Sydney marks Bicentenary of the arrival of first Catholic priests in Australia

In a major milestone for the Catholic Church in Australia, the Archdiocese of Sydney will this weekend honour two pioneering chaplains - the country's first official priests.

Irish-born Fr John Joseph Therry and Fr Philip Conolly will be honoured at a special Mass on Sunday 3 May – marking exactly 200 years since their arrival.

The priests sailed from Cork on a ship carrying more than 100 convicts and were authorised by both Church and State to celebrate Mass in the New South Wales colony, making them the first official priests in the nation's history.

Their arrival came after decades of hostility in which public Masses were forbidden in NSW.

Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP will lay flowers at the burial place of Fr Therry in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral during Sunday's Mass and pay tribute to the two founding priests in his Homily.

While Fr Conolly only remained in Sydney for less than a year before being sent to Tasmania, Fr Therry spent more than 40 years as a priest here and left a remarkable legacy, helping to establish the first church where St Mary's Cathedral now stands.

Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney the Most Rev. Terry Brady, who has a particularly keen interest in Fr Therry's story, currently works at the same church where Fr Therry spent many years as a priest in Sydney; St Augustine's in Balmain.

"He is a great personal inspiration to me and to many Catholics in Sydney," said Bishop Brady. "For five years, Fr Therry was the only Catholic priest on the Australian mainland and he became famous for travelling to remote communities on horse-back. He was tremendously hard-working and resilient and really laid great foundations for the Church in Australia.

“Fr Therry also had a great commitment to social justice, pleading with Governor Darling to ensure that Aborigines could access education and a good standard of accommodation.”

Australian Catholic Church historian, Fr Edmund Campion said Fr Therry’s legacy to the Church was profound.

“When he first arrived in Australia, he said he’d only stay here for four years, but instead he ended up staying for a remarkable 44 years and he really became the Church for the Catholics living here at that time,” said Fr Campion.

“Even though Catholics in the remote outback didn’t see him often, they knew he was here and he was dedicated to them and would minister sacraments to them, including the last rites when they were near death.”

Fr Therry and Fr Conolly will be honoured at the 10:30am Mass on Sunday 3 May at St Mary’s Cathedral. The Mass will be livestreamed via the St Mary’s Cathedral You Tube channel via this link: <https://bit.ly/3f48T7C>

ENDS

For further information/interviews: Michael Kenny Manager Communications & News Media, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. Mobile: 0438 046 406