

Today's first reading speaks about the disciples who travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch to escape persecution. At Antioch, Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel to the Greeks.

Two hundred ago, on 3 May 1820, Fr John Therry and Fr Philip Connolly arrived in Sydney as the first two Catholic chaplains recognised by the Government of the time. They arrived 30 years after the first Catholic convicts, at a time when Catholicism in Europe was severely affected by historic movements such as the French Revolution.

Fr John Therry was filled with pastoral zeal and known as a man of great love for his flock. At the time of his arrival in Australia there were about 6,000 Catholics in the Colony and by 1833 that number tripled. Through most of this time Fr Therry was the only priest in Sydney.

In 1821 Connolly travelled to Tasmania where he found a very difficult mission. He was described as a man of ability and wit who worked in Tasmania for 14 years establishing the life of the Catholic Church there.

The historic nature of this anniversary reminds us of the many Catholic priests, Religious and lay faithful in Australia who have lived their commitment to Christ and his people in a very generous way.

Paul and Barnabas went to preach the Gospel to the gentiles in Antioch. Fathers Therry and Connolly came out to these shores to minister to the small Catholic flock. All these good shepherds *urge us all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion*. Thanks to them and to many others, we now belong to Jesus and know his voice. Thanks to those who have taught us the faith, we have the certainty that we will never be lost and no one will ever steal us from our Chief and Good Shepherd. *Heavenly Father, we bless you for all the people you have sent to us to tell us about You.*