**LUKE THORP – RENEWAL OF VOWS**

The studio of the Australian artist Brett Whiteley is a vigorous 25 minute uphill walk from the Haymarket. Whiteley is not your average artist, being as far as I know, the only painter to win the Archibald, Wynne & Sulman prizes for best portrait, landscape & genre painting in the one year, namely 1978. The Surry Hills museum was dominated by Whiteley’s 1972-73 painting, all 18 panels of it, cricket pitch long, called *Alchemy.* It is essentially a vast self portrait of the artist, Australia & Asia. The artist sought to capture the theme of art transforming or transmuting life into gold. This results in an interplay between birth, beauty, sensuality, abstraction & death.

On my return to St Peter Julian’s Church, as I was relaxing with a cuppa in our dining room, I looked across at the black and white crucifixion print on the wall, then went over to the print and was dumbfounded to read the artist’s signature, “B. W”. It remains to be verified that this is indeed Brett Whiteley. But it is a fact that a sculptor friend of Whiteley, a young Jewish man, had lost his battle with cancer aged 32. Brett & his wife Wendy accompanied, nursed and cared for Joel Elenberg on the island of Bali right to the bitter end. Sadly when Whiteley lost his own battle with alcohol and opiates at only 53, he was alone in a motel.

His friend’s cancer battle inspired Whiteley to produce several versions of the crucifixion for he had been familiar with the theme through great artists. Whiteley did a series of works — all crucifixions — *Father forgive them*, *My God, My God, Why* and ‘The Giving Up’, the last with Elenberg’s chemical therapy-induced bald head cast down on a blank canvas. The print captured perfectly the pain and suffering of the crucified, especially in the distorted hands and feet. I suspect that Fr Pat Negri SSS selected the print of the crucifixion and had it framed especially for the Community dining room.

This feast of the Exaltation of the Cross marks the second renewal of vows of our Luke Thorp, a fair dinkum Generation X-er. Well some of us are pre-Baby Boomers, not even Boomers, let alone Generation X. But now we need to cast our nets even further to invite the Millennials or Gen Y: those born between ‘77 and ‘95. Can you help us discover new workers for the Lord’s vineyard?

When parish priest of Monteynard 10 km from his home town of La Mure, our future Founder, Fr Eymard, aged 26, asked his bishop to enter a new religious order (the Marist Fathers) as this order had set out to evangelize Oceania. The Grenoble Bishop de Bruillard thought he had locked the saint in for life when he refused permission to leave & said he could be a missioner inside the diocese. Fr Eymard decided to ask God for a sign, that all the parishioners make their Easter communion. They did. The bishop let Fr Eymard go. But not before Fr Eymard’s sisters put up a rear-guard action. Their plea: *One more day!* His reply: *No, tomorrow will be too late!* Already the pastoral skills of Fr Eymard in caring for Christ’s ecclesial body were legendary, as later shown in the work of first communion among the young workers in the fledgling community in Paris.

On this feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, let me share the last lines of a tribute to Brett Whiteley, called *Australia’s Wunderkind:*

Grünewald, Cimabue & Duccio fused into

the crucified Christ, your sculptor Jewish

friend Joel Elenberg bald with cancer;

studio morphing into a Strawberry Hills

shrine atop Central.

Let us support our brother Luke Thorp SSS in prayer as he makes a renewal of his vows in the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament.

*Fr Jo Dirks SSS*

*St Francis Church*

*14 September 2018*