

MELBOURNE

DAY 28 – 21st July 2008

Today has been another travelling day – but a lot longer than usual. We got up early in order to leave our hotel by 6.30 am. This meant that none of our group were there to see us off – but they had made their farewells the night before. They had another day in Sydney before the long, tiring flight home – all except Louise, who was going to stay in Kuala Lumpur for a while, and Sister Angela, who was moving on to New Zealand – oh, and the Bishop has gone up to see the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland!

Dominic and I headed for the railway station. We were going to get a taxi, but we had done this walk many times over the past week, and since it was downhill, we decided that having crossed the road, and with no taxi immediately available, we started walking.

However, I had made a wise move the night before and loaded off all my heavy items of luggage onto James Torrance so that he could take them home directly – and if it was to put him over the weight limit, then Paedar would also take something of mine in his luggage. As a result, my baggage was much lighter than it has been throughout this trip. On the other hand, Dominic had been loading things into his suitcase, including the sleeping-bag that he had bought, and was definitely struggling by the time we reached the station. On this occasion, the “old man” definitely was fitter than the “young lad”!!

We found our platform and when the train pulled in, we found our seats. We were hoping for a compartment to ourselves, but 30 seconds before departing a lady joined us. She had originated from Melbourne, but was now living in Sydney. On this occasion she was going back to Melbourne for a short break.

So we settled down to the 12 hour train journey from Sydney to Melbourne.

The countryside passed relatively quickly. The engine is similar to the 125 in the UK, but certainly does not travel at 125 miles per hour! The train would stop at stations in the middle of nowhere, and rarely go more than 50 mph, since any faster would mean that we would be thrown about the carriages as the train went round every bend. And then there was the wild-life that may or may not be on the line!!

However, the purpose of travelling by train was to see something of the real Australia – and not just the cities. In that respect we had a wonderful journey. And neither did it seem too long. It was interspersed with announcements from the buffet car stating that breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, ice cream and finally dinner were all being served. If we had eaten everything on offer, then we would have been more than bloated, but we ate what we needed, and the food was not bad at all. We had been given the advice to buy our own food before we boarded, but Dominic bought several packets of crisps (US: potato chips) and sweets (US: candy).

Soon after we crossed into the state of Victoria, the sun set and darkness quickly fell, and in no time we were pulling into the Southern Cross Station in Melbourne. We

took a taxi to Sunshine West, where Father Pius Jones lives with his community. It was some way out of the centre, but we found the place, rang the bell, and were let in by one of the priests, who was expecting a “Welsh Priest”! Father Pius and his group of young people were travelling back from World Youth Day by bus and were not due in for about another four hours.

After a while chatting and telling various stories about where we had been and how World Youth Day had gone, we retired for the night.

Sydney was cold, but Melbourne is even colder. I did not realise that Australia could be so cold. The residents of Melbourne boast that they see the four seasons every day. But our first night was bitterly cold. We both ended up putting on several layers to keep warm, even though we had heaters on too!

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We eventually surfaced just before 9.00 am for breakfast. The water was wonderfully hot, and having a hot shower seemed to bring life back into a freezing body. Even my liquid soap and shampoo had frozen overnight!!

Father Pius eventually joined us. He had had a late night, arriving at almost midnight. It was good to see him again – and this time, without the hat, it was easy to recognise the Pius we all know and love! He then dropped us at the local station so that we could get a day rail-pass for the Melbourne transport system – about £3 (US\$6) allowing you to travel throughout the city on trains, trams and buses. So as soon as we had purchased our ticket we set off on our first day of sight-seeing.

It was while I was on the train that I realised that I did not have my camera with me. I had kept my hands firmly in my pockets to keep warm, and forgot to take the camera! As a result, there are not many photos of Melbourne yet!

We arrived at the city centre and, on the advice of Father Pius, went straight to the Visitors’ Centre. This looked like a simple ticket booth in the middle of a square, but we found that that was the entrance, and the main part was underground. So we descended into the Visitors’ Centre. There was plenty of information available – on leaflets, through guides, through video-screens and through displays. We noted various things, and we were amazed when we left there that we had spent almost two hours there!

So, armed with ideas, we started walking the streets. It was reassuring to find one of the first streets that we came to was “Bourke Street”. We even found a shop called Miki, and Dominic wanted to take a photo of me in front of Miki’s shop on Bourke Street!! Naturally I wouldn’t let him!

By then it was lunch time, so we called into one of the many food courts dotted around the city and while Dominic had a Chinese meal, I had a Japanese meal. That set us up for the afternoon!

We then took the “tourist shuttle” around the city. This is a free service which calls at most of the main city sites, with a running commentary on the way. I find that this is always a great way to quickly acquaint oneself with a new city, and give some idea of the main landmarks and how to get there later.

We finished the tour after about an hour, and were told that there was an old tram that does a similar circuit, but on a completely different route. So, we trundled around the city for a further 90 minutes taking in the views, and listening to the commentary. Melbourne has one of the largest tram systems in the world, and it is very efficient. The modern trams are very comfortable and warm, though the tourist one makes you feel as though you are playing the tourist, and is not quite so smooth a ride, but enormous fun!



We then made for the Catholic Cathedral of St Patrick – we knew exactly where to go, thanks to the tram tour! It is quite an impressive building, but while there we saw several dozen World Youth Day back-packs. It seems that many pilgrims have stayed on to do what we have done – namely, visit another city in Australia! Indeed, we have seen the orange and yellow back-packs all over the place!!

Night had now fallen, and so we headed for the Southgate section of the city, which is noted for its restaurants. We found one where we enjoyed a hearty meal before taking the train back to West Sunshine, where Father Pius was waiting for us as the train arrived. He gave us a quick tour of the parish, along with some interesting facts. His parish is made up of many immigrants from Italy, Malta and India.

One startling fact that he gave me was that the number of Catholics in India is more than the total number of people in Australia! But we are unable to think of numbers on their own, yet when we make comparisons, it is only then that we realise just how many Catholics there are throughout the world. 95% of Melbourne used to be Catholic, though it has now dropped to below 50%!!

Many of the young people who arrived for World Youth Day will undoubtedly take home with them the fact that there are many, many people throughout the world who believe as they do. That should give them encouragement when they return to their homes, where inevitably they are in a minority!

DAY 30 – 23rd July 2008

This morning we started a little earlier, and made a quick tour of the Church property. There used to be a lot more, but it has been sold off in order to pay for a proposed extension on the Church. Father Pius told us that originally there was a lot of land, but it was not much good for anything, but with the expanding population all land is now valuable, and the land that the Church used to own already has housing and hotels on it!

After popping into the end of the Italian Mass, we greeted Pius and his black Labrador, and then took the bus to the station. Once we were in the city centre, we took a train to Belgrave, where we boarded an old steam train, nicknamed “Puffing Billy”.



I suppose many would think me quite mad – now don't all agree at once! But it was a cold day – we were wearing at least five layers of clothing – and here we were in the mountains to the west of Melbourne, travelling in open-air carriages pulled by a steam train for some 25 kilometres!! But it was fun!! The scenery was also spectacular. The train was a narrow-gauge locomotive from the middle of the 18th century that had been restored by enthusiasts, and ran along the original rails, except for a part that had been lost through a landslide, forcing the closing of the line. The enthusiasts had built around the landslide and reopened the railway in the 1960's. It has been a popular tourist venue ever since!



At the end of the line we were given just over an hour to do whatever we wanted. I thought it would be a long hour, shivering in the cold, but nothing more than ice-cream to purchase. However, we found a model railway there – boasting to be the world's largest! Dominic and I entered, and were mesmerised for a long time. Indeed

we spent so long looking at things – including Thomas the Tank Engine, the theme of which I then started to sing to Dominic, much to his annoyance – that the owner eventually told us that they were calling for the last passengers on the train – we had spent over an hour looking at the models! A distance memory from childhood was rekindled!



We eventually got back to the centre of Melbourne shortly before 5.00 pm. Most places were closing then, so we headed for “Melbourne - 360” – an opportunity to go to the top of one of the tallest buildings in Melbourne and wander around its observation deck for as long as we wanted. The sun had already set, but the sky continued to glow red for some time. We stayed quite a while, since I still had not seen the “Southern Cross” constellation, and thought that from the top of the building I would see it. But even after total darkness had descended, I had failed to find it.



By this time, Dominic was moaning about being hungry, so we headed for a restaurant that I had seen advertised near the Flinders Street Station. We entered and had a wonderful meal. It was called “Fifteen Melbourne” and is owned by Jamie Oliver. This is his first venture in Australia, and is based on what he did in London – taking a group of people and training them to be chefs, waiters and bar staff. With Jamie’s background, it was of course mainly Italian food, so both Dominic and I were delighted.

We were a little late getting back, so after another unsuccessful search of the heavens for the “Southern Cross”, we slipped in quietly.