

MELBOURNE part 2

DAY 31 – 24th July 2008

First of all, apologies for taking an age to upload the last part of the blog. I put this down to computer problems, which have now been sorted out, and hopefully I will keep up to date (every two days or so) with the rest of this blog.

Thursday started with laundry. Dominic and I decided that while we had the opportunity we would throw everything that we had into the washing machine so that we would start off again from Australia with suitcases of mostly clean clothes. However, no sooner had we turned on the washing machine, than Father Pius' housekeeper turned up, telling us to leave everything to her. So, she kindly completed the wash cycles and then dried off all the clothes, finally ironing everything. When we returned later, we found everything neatly folded on our respective beds.

As a result of the above, we were much later than usual setting off for the city. We had by this time sorted out the best route – taking a bus to the station and purchasing a cheaper, combined bus and rail card on the bus that covered the whole Melbourne area – rather than buying two separate tickets which actually cost more! The train took us into the City Loop – the main train stations of Melbourne, any of which were ideal for the different sights!

This time we got off at the Southern Cross Station, and took the short walk to the World Trade Centre, which housed the Melbourne Police Museum. The first thing that we encountered was the famous armour worn by Ned Kelly and his gang. Although the heavy steel plating protected him from bullets, it is easy to see how cumbersome it must have been to wear. Ned Kelly was finally captured when he was shot in the legs – the suit of armour prevented him from seeing much, and he could not run with such a weight! Now, it is the main exhibit in the Police Museum.

Along with it, of course, was much of the true story of the Kelly gang (originally from County Antrim, Ireland). But there were also exhibits from many of the gruesome murders that have taken place over the past 150 years or so (although the Aborigines are probably the oldest race on this planet, the modern history of Australia can be traced to Victorian times). There were knives and cut-throat razors – still with the blood of their victims showing; there were gruesome photographs of many of the victims of crime; and there were the tributes to the members of the police force who had lost their lives while on duty.

After this gruesome exhibit, Dominic and I then headed to the Old Melbourne Gaol. This started with a visit to the Watch Tower (nothing to do with Jehovah's Witnesses on this occasion), but was something of an unforgettable experience. We were greeted by an active policewoman, and each given a card with our assumed identity, alleged crime, arresting officer and other details. I was "done" for manufacturing illicit materials; Dominic had been arrested for theft!! Along with others in the group, we were taken through the process that any criminal would undergo. The process had not changed for centuries, and the gaol was only closed in 1994, when a new one was opened.

We were questioned, searched, locked in a cell, had the light turned out (an experience that no-one was to have in reality), and finally allowed into the exercise yard before being released without charge!



I took the opportunity, however, to take a photograph of Dominic with his identity number in his “mug-shot”. I also texted his mother to tell him the “bad news that Dominic had been arrested for theft, and had been locked up in gaol”. Stupidly, I did not think of the time difference, and I had actually woken her up at 6.30 am with such news. Needless to say, she initially believed me ... and then realised what was happening, at which point I let her go back to sleep!

We then moved into the gaol itself. This was set out like a typical Victorian prison, but in each of the cells there were the death-masks, along with the stories of the various prisoners who had been executed in the gaol. As you might guess, the “pride of place” went to Ned Kelly, who was executed in the gaol a few weeks after being caught. The gallows where he was hanged are still there, and his death-mask is on display under the gallows itself.



The history of the gaol was not just about executions, but covered all the other matters that would concern prisoners, especially those who were not executed, detailing what they would do each day, what they would eat, etc. We found the whole experience so fascinating, that it was only the closing bell that brought us back to our senses, and our other plans for the day went out the window.

Since everything was beginning to close around us, we made our way towards the southgate area (south of the river) and found a restaurant where they were celebrating Christmas in July, complete with Christmas Trees and decorations. It certainly felt cold enough, but we had mastered that by using a simple ploy of the residents of Melbourne – several layers of clothing, with no thought to whether they clash or not –

so we each had about five or six layers of clothing on these days, and felt reasonably warm.

After our meal, we returned to the presbytery, but we looked to the skies once again. This however upset Father Pius dog, who began to bark. Father Kevin, one of the priests who helps out, came out to see who was trespassing. However, as soon as he saw that it was us, and what we were doing, he decided to help us out. “You see the two bright stars”, he said, “well they are the ‘pointers’, and they point to the centre of the Southern Cross”. As soon as he said that, the Southern Cross was immediately clear for all, even for the visitors from Wales to see! I am pleased that at least I managed to see the constellation before I left Australia.

DAY 32 – 25th July 2008

Today is our last day in Melbourne. We spent a little while packing our things together, ready to pick up when we would return later in the day, and after a quick breakfast we set off for the city again. Father Pius had yet another funeral – something that he seemed to have every day since his return from Sydney.

Our first port of call was the Queen Victoria Market. This is an exciting market, covering all kinds of items, as well as fruit, meats, fish, clothing, Australian souvenirs, etc. We wandered up and down the aisles, with memories of how Covent Garden used to be. The similarities in Melbourne with things at home, especially in London, is witness again to the extent of the British Empire, and, just as in Delhi, I felt a connection between all countries.

We spent most of the morning in the market, and finished it off with some fish and chips in one of the market cafes.



We then moved towards the opposite end of the city, and headed for the Melbourne Museum, next to the Exhibition Centre (above). There were advertisements throughout Melbourne for a “Dinosaurs eggs and babies” and “History of Melbourne” exhibits. When we asked for tickets, we were told that the dinosaur exhibition was for children aged under 8, so we opted for the ticket that included the “History of Melbourne” exhibit only.

There is, as is usual in any museum, too much to see, and once again our time had run out. We had set a limit of 4.30 pm to leave the city, in order to get back to Sunshine,

the parish where Father Pius lives, pick up our luggage and return to the Southern Cross Station. It was my last opportunity to get a photo of his Church!



However, when we got back, his housekeeper greeted us. She had wanted to say good-bye. She in turn informed Father Pius, who then took time out of his busy schedule, offering to drive us to the station with our luggage. It took me a while to realise that we were on our way into the city – he was driving us to the Southern Cross station. In many ways, I was glad that it gave us a time to have a long chat together, and of the fond memories that he has of serving in Menevia.

He left us at the station, and we moved to the platform, where our overnight train to Sydney was due to leave. However, we found that there was a delay in its arrival, and so our departure time was consequently delayed by over an hour.

That gave us the opportunity to grab something to eat, and for Dominic to gather several snacks together. We boarded the train and found our sleeper that I had booked. This was something of a novelty for Dominic again, though whether he knew it or not, he was “booked” into the upper bunk – there is no way that I would be able to climb up such a narrow ladder!!



There was a shared toilet and shower between two neighbouring compartments, so I asked Dominic to set the alarm for 5.30 am, which would give me a chance of getting a shower before arriving at Sydney. The journey was not the best I have experienced. Our compartment must have been over the wheels, and I don't think the track has been upgraded since it was first laid. That meant that every bump and jolt meant the whole bed, indeed the whole compartment shaking wildly. I did not get any sleep at

all – until we neared Sydney, that is. Clearly in the extended suburbs of Sydney the rail network has been upgraded, and the clattering and banging stopped – and I must have drifted off to sleep.

Dominic tells me that his alarm went off, but I did not hear it. The first thing I knew was the guard announcing that our breakfast tray was at the door! I quickly had a shower, but was unable to shave, since we had made up time overnight, and were due into Sydney on time. By the time we pulled things together, and our neighbours in the compartment next door had used the shower, we were pulling into Sydney Central Station.

DAY 33 – 26th July 2008

We had planned our first Saturday 26th July (all will be explained in the next blog) reasonably carefully. We thought that the best idea would be to go directly to the airport and leave our luggage in the left luggage department there. That is precisely what we did. It meant that we had to change platforms at Central Station and buy new tickets, but it was something of a relief to get rid of the luggage for the day.

We then headed back into the centre of Sydney to visit some of the sites which we had missed out on during the World Youth Day celebrations.

Our first duty was to try and find a police-station to report the loss of Dominic’s MP3 player. As we were entering Randwick Race Course for the all night vigil the previous week, Dominic was the only one of the group whose bag was opened and searched. Without his knowledge, his MP3 player was not replaced at this time, but he did not notice until later. For insurance purposes a police report was requested. However, wherever the map said there was a police-station, there was none open. We were given a number to call, but I left that detail to Dominic. Are we surprised that when I asked him later whether he had managed to report the incident, he told me that he had “forgotten to do it”??



Our next port of call was to St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney. During the World Youth Day celebrations, the Pope had stayed here, and so it was off limits for everyone, and security closed the cathedral for the week. Now, with the Pope back in Rome, we had the opportunity to visit this magnificent building. The marble flooring in the crypt was beautifully done, but it was not difficult to be at home in this Cathedral.

Outside in Hyde Park, where we had spent many hours, the World Youth Day Merchandise tent was still open, and they were still selling! Indeed, I would imagine that they will be selling off a lot of merchandise for some time to come! Some of it is of good quality, but bulky; some is just not really suitable for the pilgrims who came to Australia.

One thing that we have noticed over the past week is the number of orange and yellow back-packs (one was handed to each pilgrim) that we have seen in Melbourne and Sydney. It is clear that many have stayed and done what we have done – visited Australia as well! The reports in the papers have been extremely positive. One very moving report was from a bus driver in Sydney, who wrote an article of his experiences. He tells of a hectic day when he had been driving pilgrims everywhere, when after his shift, he was driving back to the depot when he saw a group of tired pilgrims. He stopped and picked them up, turned his bus around and drove them to their destination – as well as picking others up on the way. The pilgrims in their turn, who realised what he had done, took up a collection for him – including flags of their countries, snacks, combs and other items, which just delighted him. He wrote so positively of what the pilgrims had done to put a smile on the faces of everyone in Sydney.

And as for those who come up with stories of condoms and the like being handed out at the last World Youth Day, I saw for myself the attempts of some to do the same this time, but the countless number of young people who smiled and simply said “no thank you”, as well as some who actually gave the full teaching of the Church in direct and simple language. I am afraid that the condom companies will not make anything from World Youth Day this year!

Other material was also handed out from many groups in Sydney. In general it was accepted with a smile, and then gently thrown into a bin. The only exception was a scurrilous and deeply anti-catholic leaflet that was handed out at the entrance to Randwick Race Course. As we walked home later that day Father Phillip and I noticed that every leaflet had been ripped to pieces and dropped on the road. It only happened to this one particular leaflet, and I wonder if the company that issued them should be billed for the clear-up. Otherwise there was no litter problem from the pilgrims! These young people are Catholic, know their faith, practice their faith, and are proud of their faith! And we are proud of them too! Hopefully, everyone who attended will in turn be strengthened in what they practice, since they realise that they are not a minority in this world, even though it may feel as though they are sometimes!

Anyway, after this diversion, I return to the final day that Dominic and I spent in Sydney.

We bought a few things in the World Youth Day tent and then headed for the Sydney Tower. This has a wonderful view from the top, though it took a long time to get to the top. Only two of the lifts (elevators) were working, and it seemed that all the pilgrims who had stayed in Sydney wanted to go to the top! However, the reward of the views from the top, made the wait worth it!



Attached to the entry ticket was entry to the Oz-trek – a virtual journey around the land of Australia, complete with one of the simulated rides that we are so used to at Disney! It rounded off a successful visit to Australia.

After a bite to eat, we headed for the airport, checked in, and boarded the plane!