



Anniversary of Sr Irene McCormack RSJ [21 May 1991]

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**Convent of the Sisters of St Joseph, South Perth
Saturday 27 May, 2023**

The last time I saw Irene was before she left Perth for Peru in 1987.

She called into the Catholic Church Office, and we met and talked together for some time. Irene spoke about her excitement at going on mission to Peru, about her apprehension at learning Spanish, and what she was to encounter in a poor and remote country area, and how she would cope. She had already heard of the needs of the families and children. She knew that education and encouragement were essential if the people were to be lifted out of poverty. Irene's heart was to be stolen by the children, especially those with disabilities.

Irene was aware of the dangers that the Sisters faced. She showed both her realism and deep desire to go for the sake of the people and children of Huasahuasi. The prophet Isaiah wrote that the Lord puts a word into the ear for each of us to first hear, and then listen deeply to, and so ponder his voice. The word became even clearer through getting to know the lives and the needs of those children. She felt that they were calling her. Irene was prepared to go back for a second stint, despite the possible cost to herself.

Irene listened like a disciple, as the disciple did to the Song of the Suffering Servant we have just heard. She would have to drink from the same cup that Jesus himself had to drink: the cup of suffering because she listened to the call of God too, and trusted like Jesus in the loving plan of God for the people to whom she was sent in his name.

This we know from what Irene has left us in her letters and other writings. She was prepared to take up this cup of suffering by remaining with and working for the people of Huasahuasi. For Jesus, the Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah helped him to understand his identity and mission.

This in turn helped the early Christians to come to terms with the death of Jesus and gave them a new understanding of Jesus. For Irene, the image of the Suffering Servant must have contributed to her faith and trust in God, so that she could go the extra mile: to believe that great good could result from her sacrifice, as the words of the Song remind us all, "But I have not been disgraced, for the Lord God comes to my help".



One day the terror she faced would be changed to peace. Disadvantage and poverty be changed to opportunity and development. What a hope and legacy her faith and trust has been to everyone who has heard her story!

What does Irene's life say to us? Has she a word that sustains us? "The Lord God has taught me what to speak, that I may know the word that sustains the weary."

She learnt that she could believe in the God of love, and that she would trust in God that all would be well. This, I believe, is the word that she offers to each of us today: the word that comes from Jesus that can turn sadness to joy, and weariness and despair to new life.