



Letter from Bunbury

By Bishop David McCall

THEREFORE, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... This evening, or in the next day or so, take a few minutes and read chapter 11 and the first two verses of chapter 12 of the Letter to the Hebrews.

The author of this letter paints a powerful and moving picture of the faith and the actions of the fathers of Israel. He names some and mentions their deeds. He goes on to refer to the faith of many others and to their faithfulness in the face of persecution and even death.

He continues: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

These are wonderful words of encouragement to us. We are not alone! As individual Christians we are one with our sisters and brothers in Christ on earth **and** with those who have gone before us.

The picture the author paints is that of the ancient games where the contestants were surrounded by a huge crowd of spectators urging them on. He suggests that we are on a journey (or a race) and that there is a great cloud of witnesses urging us on.

We are encouraged by those who have gone before, not only by their heroic example, but also by their prayers. We are challenged to *lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely*. The love of earthly treasures and our yielding to sin are things we must set aside. These things are a terrible burden, but we can be inspired by the great cloud of witnesses and we can look to the One who has prepared a place for us.

Indeed we are already at one with them. This truth is expressed in our liturgy when we hear the words: *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name.*

It is good for us to remember that the universal nature of our faith means that we are linked with the followers of Jesus both across the nations and down through the ages. Further it is the same faith. We have much to learn from the teachings and the example of the saints down through the centuries. Often new insights will come as we read of their understanding of all the God has done for us in the movement of creation, redemption and transformation.

May Mary and all the saints pray for us, may the Lord Jesus Christ touch our minds and our hearts and may the Holy Spirit renew each one of us and strengthen the bonds we have with one another in this life and in the life to come.