

Views from the Pews: A tribute to Mary

Today is marked as a day when we remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. In the southwest corner of the nave is a small statue of the Mother holding the Son. It is an image that has in the past brought out both devotion and sledgehammers. Devotion we can understand, but sledgehammers?

I learned about sledgehammers when trying to smash some of our more famous family scones for chook grit. Blokes, and some female equivalents, just love that sense of power. Hammers - especially of the sledge variety - wrecking balls, heavy machinery, shells, bombs, explosives of all kinds, are such a buzz. Breaking things has also become a popular pastime time with our history revisionists, those of us who want to change history by forgetting it after they remove offensive objects from sight.

It is not new, this passion for removing idols. Henry VIII had a great time with the wrecking ball when he closed down the monasteries in the mid 16th century. Oliver Cromwell did the same in the 17th century. This century opened with the Taliban shelling age-old Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. That has been followed by the infamous toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, the smashing and removing of statues in the US and Britain, and even the banishment of poor old Johnny Hamilton's effigy in our own Cathedral city.

What is it that makes pieces of carved minerals, or paintings, or tapestries and other artefacts so dangerous to some people? Why, 'we' even removed the 16th (Waikato) Regimental Colours from the Cathedral and buried them in the garden. Such destruction follows after the significance of the messages in artifacts and images is recognised and rejected. It is a perfect example of the fallacious belief that attacking the messenger will make the message go away. On the contrary, the message remains and the knowledge those images reveal(ed), loved or hated, strengthens our faith and gives us wisdom.

Our small statue of Mary with its message of Christian love, in a Cathedral filled with icons, is the perfect antidote to the rage filled anger which prevents intelligent interaction with history. It is beauty unplugged. It is why we are here.

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