

From the Diary of Bishop John Francis Norton – 1925

Inscription....

*Diary kept for my dearest Mother
on the P. & O Steamer "Mongolia"
by John F. Norton
With the Australian National
Pilgrimage to Rome & Lourdes 1925.*

15th, 16th, 17th, 18th & 19th April

All these days were spent crossing the Great Australian Bight. It does not stand high in the esteem of seafaring men, for it can be both rough and cold. This time it seemed to have made up its mind to refute the ugly slanders current about it, for it was both calm and mild.



We have got quite accustomed now to the routine of ship life. After Mass in the morning there is an interval in which to say some Office. Then comes breakfast. The meals are all lengthy performances, for as there is nothing particular for to be in a hurry, we just take as much time as we choose. Our table is for four - the Bishop, Fr Bakker of Melbourne, Fr Aylward of Adelaide and myself. We have a walk on deck and then begin to read. I often thought amid the multitude of duties in Bathurst when I would not handle a book for weeks at a time, except my Breviary, that if the day ever came when there would be leisure on my hands that then perhaps my old love for reading would be found to have been dried up through lack of cultivation. But thank God, I have found my apprehensions to be groundless for I have read constantly all the time I have been on the boat, nothing solid it is true, for the ship's library does not cater for the studious, but still I have renewed my acquaintance with "Vanity Fair" and "Adam Bide" and the other old favourites that seem to improve like wine with the years. We are interrupted about 11am by the arrival of the deck with a cup of beef tea and a biscuit. It is a ship tradition, this beef tea, and it tastes all right. Then, reading again till lunch.

This is another lengthy affair. It is followed by another walk on deck. We have plenty of room in the 1st Saloon for it is 100 feet long so a person going up one side and down the other ten times can do a mile any time he is so minded. Sometimes I have forty winks then, sitting in one of the comfortable chairs of the smoke room. At four we have afternoon tea. I usually finish my Office afterwards and then another good spell of reading till dinner which is at seven. At 8.15pm all the pilgrims assemble in the 2d. Dining Saloon and say the Rosary.

Sometimes in the dark O'Kinner dining room the stewards sang one of the Latin Hymns "Ave Maris Stella", "Veni Creator Spiritus" in one of their quaint native hymn tunes. They were excellent fellows - these "darkies" from Goa, and as full of the Faith as in the days when St Francis Xavier gave the "word" to their ancestors. Our pilgrimage is a great boon to them poor lads. They have Mass every morning at 5am. Forty of them made their Easter Duty on Easter Sunday. They have all been presented with Rosaries by Archbishop Mannix, and for once in their lives they were made to feel that they were as good as their fair skinned brothers. If the truth were known they are miles ahead of most of them. Our steward who boasts the fine sounding name of Cassiano Barretto, is a fine little fellow with jet black hair and eyes. He is like his brethren, a wonderful waiter and seems to know just what you want without even telling him.

If the Bishop is not on deck, and unfortunately for most of the days he has not been able to leave his cabin, many times during the day I go down and see him and if he wants anything. Archbishop Mannix whose cabin is next to ours, is a constant visitor and shows great consideration by staying for long periods chatting away.

The last of the days in this section of my diary was Sunday and at the 10 o'clock Mass we always have on Sunday, as well as the earlier ones, Archbishop Mannix preached a beautiful little sermon on the Gospel text "Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed". He has a low pitched voice and his delivery is quite unaffected and natural. He gave point to his discourse by showing that we pilgrims were making a long journey in faith, and urged us to keep a good intention in our pilgrimage, so that it would be always an act of faith, and never become a sight-seeing expedition. For this purpose he asked us to suffer the inconveniences of the journey in the right spirit.

Just at the time, some of us could not feel that there would be many of these for us, but before many days had gone we found that in a modern ocean liner with all the luxuries that modern ship building can devise that one can find but a poor substitute for a dwelling, no matter how humble on land. When we came later to the Indian Ocean with its humid heat, both by night and day, we saw that his Grace was only too true in his estimate of what we would have to endure.