

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.*

28th April

We were looking forward all day to our arrival in Colombo which takes place tomorrow. It will break the monotony of this journey. I am realising more and more the truth of the Archbishop's words when he spoke of the inconveniences we would be likely to suffer in going on this pilgrimage. It is impossible to eat anything, for although the Dining Room is splendid and the menu most varied, still it is all chilled or frozen food and one has not much relish for it.

We had arranged to go on a motor trip to Kandy, the ancient capital of Ceylon, and I was looking forward with eager anticipation to seeing the interior of the island. The "Mongolia" would have to stay nearly two days as the China mail had not arrived, and we would have to wait for this steamer. This delay meant we could stay in Kandy overnight, and thus the journey would be in no way fatiguing. Night came on, heavy and intensely hot. About 2am in the morning the Bishop could not stand the cabin any longer. So he went to sit on a couch about twelve paces from our cabin door, in a sort of vestibule. This is one of the coolest and airiest places in the whole boat, as a couple of passages converge on it, the wide stairway to the big open music room ascends from it, as that to the dining room below, and besides there are two doorways opening to either side deck. Even sitting in this cool place gave him little relief and the continued spasms culminated in a violent heart seizure about 2.30am. With the utmost difficulty he made his way to the cabin and called me. He remarked afterwards how quickly I awoke, although his call must have been very faint. I saw at once how ill he was, and I rang for the steward. He was at hand in a moment, although it seemed an eternity. I told him to get the Doctor at once and so soon did he arrive that I had barely time to give the Bishop absolution and anoint him before he was with us. He immediately gave the Bishop an injection of strychnine, although he feared it would be too late. However, thanks be to God, the heart responded to the powerful drug and in a little while the good effects were apparent. The Bishop came round gradually and before long we were able to get him into a comfortable position in bed. The doctor remained for a while and then saw that it safe to leave. The hour was then 3.30am. I remained on watch till sometime after 4am - and then I prepared the Altar to say Mass. What a relief it was to have some form of activity. It was the Feast of the Patronage of St Joseph, and the words of the Introit seemed very appropriate to our present position "Adjutor y protector noster est Joseph" "Joseph is our helper and our protector". I offered the Mass for the Bishop in the hope that St Joseph would not abandon us in our hour of need. Nor did he. The Bishop had an easier day considering the great crisis through which he had passed. I gave him Holy Communion and when Mass was over he seemed much easier.

