The Reverend Tony Card

“As we take our own journey of faith we too should trust God, even if we have to leave behind the familiar for the unknown.”

Carol Service Address - Wednesday, 3rd December 2014

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt. (Matthew 2:14, NRSV)

Eddie was just a young man when the Nazis invaded Poland. He tried to avoid being taken prisoner by hiding in the forest, surviving on whatever he could catch or find. Eventually he was captured and was sent to the Birkenau concentration camp where he was a servant to the officers. Towards the end of the war an officer was being transferred to a prison farm and was allowed to take one prisoner as his personal servant. He chose Eddie.

It was at the farm that Eddie met Maria. She was also a prisoner. At the end of the war they married and came to Australia with their young son, Eric, as refugees fleeing war ravaged Poland. They spent some time in a camp in Bathurst before being relocated to a camp in Sydney.

Eventually they left the camp and began to build a proper life. Eric was sent back to Bathurst to school at Stannies (St Stanislaus’ College). Eddie worked for over 30 years for what we now know as Telstra. He built his own home, bought a new car and raised his family in this land of opportunity. He had a strong faith. In his later years he looked back at his life and could see how God walked with him, giving him what he needed just when he needed it.

Eddie was my wife's grandfather. Without his journey as a refugee she wouldn't be here and I probably wouldn't be standing before you today.

At the age of two, Ahn Do was bundled up by his father and along with his younger brother, mother, other family members and people (39 in total) they boared an old wooden boat to escape communist Vietnam. They had no idea where they were heading and no idea just how perilous their journey would be. After being attacked twice by pirates in the first few days they were eventually rescued and taken to a refugee camp in Malaysia. Three months later they were offered sanctuary in Australia and came to this country not knowing the language or culture.

One of the first acts of love shown to them was in the form of clothing from Vinnies (St Vincent de Paul Society). Even though something got lost in translation they ended up with boys clothes for Ahn and girls clothes for his brother, Khoa, the family was extremely grateful. After settling in to life in Australia the two boys attended St Aloysius’ College in Milsons Point. Again they experienced God’s love. After Ahn's father left the family the College supported them, allowing them to stay on even though their mother couldn't afford the cost of a private education.

Ahn’s faith was shaped by his experiences at St Aloysius’ and by the experiences of his family. His mother was in a convent training to be a nun when the communists closed the convents and outlawed religion. His uncle, a soldier, was due on a ship but missed it after a big night out. As the ship headed out to sea it exploded. Thankful for being saved, he became a Jesuit priest.

Ahn’s faith was shaped by his experiences at St Aloysius’ and by the experiences of his family. His mother was in a convent training to be a nun when the communists closed the convents and outlawed religion. His uncle, a soldier, was due on a ship but missed it after a big night out. As the ship headed out to sea it exploded. Thankful for being saved, he became a Jesuit priest.

We know Ahn Do as a crazy comedian, ‘The Happiest Refugee’, sharing his experiences with audiences around the world. His brother, Khoa, received the Young Australian of the Year Award in 2005 for his work helping street kids in south-west Sydney. Despite their challenges, Ahn’s family speak of God’s work in their lives, “We give all the credit to the big fella upstairs.”

I came across a quote the other day, “An immigrant leaves his homeland to find greener grass. A refugee leaves his homeland because the grass is burning under his feet.” The experiences of Eddie, Ahn, Khoa, and the millions of people around the world who have had to flee for their safety are testament to this.

Our God understands refugees. Jesus was a refugee. Our bible readings tonight went beyond the familiar Christmas story to the events that occurred after the visit of the Wise Men. Joseph received another vision from God in a dream. The angel told him to flee with Mary and Jesus because the grass under their feet was about to be burnt. Herod was not going to risk a rival king and would do whatever it took to eliminate the threat to his power. But God had a different plan.

It must have taken extreme courage on Joseph’s part to obey the angel. He was venturing into an unknown land, leaving behind everything that was familiar to him and his family. Joseph trusted God. He knew that whatever challenges were before him that God would be with him.

Eddie trusted God as he and his family fled Poland. Ahn’s family trusted God as they fled Vietnam. As we take our own journey of faith we too should trust God, even if we have to leave behind the familiar for the unknown. Just as God protected and blessed Eddie, just as he protected and blessed Ahn and Khoa, he will protect and bless us. He has already proven this in the life of Jesus. He has promised that our faith in him will be rewarded.

May we all put our trust in Jesus as we celebrate his birth this Christmas.

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary, fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this Christmas and always.