

**Excerpts read by Sr Carmel Moore from
“Julian Tenison Woods. The Human Journey: Priest, Founder, Friend”**

From pages 128-129 : **The Penola Years: 1857-1867**

When newly ordained twenty-four-year-old Father Julian Woods stepped ashore at Guichen Bay in March 1857 he continued to Penola, the centre of his parish, in the seventy-five-mile two day ride, arriving on 19 March. These were the first of many days in the saddle. His subsequent ten years in the 22,000 square mile parish extending fourteen miles into Victoria saw him on the move for weeks at a time. We learn precise details of this life from two first-hand accounts-his published talk, 'Ten Years in the Bush', and his *Memoirs* dictated towards the end of his life.

He describes days 'almost continually on horseback'. He followed a routine of visits to the main centres, travelling in different directions to meet all his parishioners. In travelling he usually rode thirty to forty miles a day, but often fifty to sixty, occasionally seventy, but not on the one horse, he added. Sometimes he walked for miles through mud or rough country when the horse 'knocked up'.

The privations, he said, were fatigue from riding and hunger and headaches from fasting when journeys outstripped carried supplies. He slept on his saddle or stayed in huts with shepherds or with families. It was a demanding life, but he liked it 'because he considered it a true missionary life'. He usually reached all his parishioners once a year....

It was because of his widespread travelling among his parishioners that he saw the spiritual desolation there and especially that of the children, who were as he said, 'entirely cut off from any religious instruction: He kept remembering the Sisters of St Joseph he had seen in France and began, he said, 'constantly brooding' over the establishment of a religious order of Sisters with a similar spirit, to meet the needs of these children. The idea of the sisterhood came precisely out of the vast travel the young priest did to reach all his parishioners, and his will to respond to this need. As is well known, he and Mary MacKillop launched this foundation on 19 March, St Joseph's day, in his tenth year in the parish.

His parishioners' presentation at the end of his Penola years reveals their love for their pastor. They loved him for his zeal and energy, his care of the weak, needy and sick. In their opening words, they said he had 'endeared himself to them by gentle ties ministering to their spiritual wants'. They noted his 'zealous and unceasing discharge' of his 'sacred office in this very large and thinly populated district' and the privations of this ministry carried out as their 'pastor and friend'. They concluded, 'Go then, gentle minister of our loving God'.

From pages 213–215 **Fr Woods describes his first visit to Newcastle**

“Newcastle is a large seaport town about seventy miles north of Sydney. It is the great coal depot of Australia, and perhaps as beautifully situated as any place on the coast of New South Wales, except Wollongong. The only way to it is by sea

At last we came in sight of what looked like an island, with a lighthouse of corpulent proportions and a large lantern on the top. Away from this stretches a long line of broken

water with angry-looking waves and foam all round. This is the bar of the Hunter River. The passage from Sydney is usually rather rough, owing to the long heavy swell of the Pacific; but when the steamer gets upon the bar, she tosses and pitches in good earnest and hot haste. But it is soon over. There is dash, and foam, and fury around for a moment or two, and then comes smoother water. Two or three high curling breakers sweep defiantly after the stern of the vessel, and as the last dies out she glides inside the island and breakwater straight to the forest of collier ships by the wharves of Newcastle.

There is something very remarkable in the change from storm to stillness in this voyage, and it makes one inclined to look upon the town before you with a pleasant feeling. It rises very abruptly from the water side and certainly in its first aspect awakens all the grimy associations of coal. It is rather inclined to be black; the houses are huddled together, and there is a good deal of smoke. ... But it is a busy thriving place; they say that the supplies of coal are inexhaustible. ...

But let us go up to the Catholic Church, which you can see from the river high up upon the hill side in the midst of a cluster of houses. As we go up you will remark the extraordinary steepness of the streets. Well, this cannot be helped. No conveyance can climb some of them. Only a fly belonging to the Alpine Club could be supposed to make the journey in comfort. ... Meanwhile the humble pedestrian picks a precarious path along the kerbstone with patience and resignation inversely proportionate to the tenderness of his feet. If you go straight up the hill to the church you will find the street slightly interrupted by a cliff some 30 feet in height. When this discovery is made you turn away and skirt the hill coming down upon the church from above.

The church in Newcastle is dedicated to our Lady Star of the Sea. Singularly enough the lighthouse, which guides the mariner to a safe passage over the bar of the river, has had to be erected close beside the portal of the building. All night long therefore, there is a brilliant light at the church, which is a star of the sea in a double sense. It is a large and handsome edifice, built of brick and stone. Like St. Patrick's in Sydney, it consists of two storeys, and the school is underneath. I can't say that I like this arrangement either for the sake of the church or the sake of the school, but it is economical at all events. There is to be a tower to the building, so that as yet it is unfinished. The interior is plain, but very neat and orderly; indeed the nice cleanliness and propriety of this church reflect the highest credit on the Rev Father Ryan, to whose care it is confided....

Opposite the church there is a fine commodious presbytery. The view from the verandah is magnificent. Not only does it look down upon the city, but it includes the river, the entrance, the shipping, the islands beyond, and then the mountains in the distance, making a prospect of singular variety and beauty. I have seen little in New South Wales to surpass it.