

BUNGARUN - August 17, 2025.

A Day of Pilgrimage, Remembrance, and Grace at Bungarun

What an extraordinary and deeply moving day we shared at Bungarun — a day of both sorrow and joy. As we gathered to honour the story of the Derby Leprosarium, we found ourselves immersed in a chapter of history that holds significant meaning for the Diocese of Broome and significant meaning for many whose lives are connected to the sacred place.

The day began with a Jubilee Year Pilgrimage — a 14-kilometre walk across the Derby marsh, from the Derby Cemetery to the Bungarun Cemetery. This journey was more than a physical act; it was gentle and prayerful, setting a peace filled tone for the hours that followed. Arriving at the edge of the marsh, pilgrims were joined by the wider congregation, and together continued the pilgrimage in a reverent procession reciting the rosary, walking behind a statue of Mary graciously donated by a local family.

At the Bungarun Cemetery, Bishop Tim, Fr Steve (Parish Priest of Derby), and Fr Liam (Vicar General) led us in a profoundly spirit-filled celebration of the *Missa Terra Spiritus Sancti*. The liturgy included a Water Blessing Rite from some of our local Aboriginal people. The participation in the Mass was wholehearted and uplifting, a true testament to the spiritual desire of the people of our Diocese.

Following the celebration of the Eucharist, many took time for quiet reflection, visiting the graves of loved ones and pausing to honour the lives, stories, and sacrifices held in that sacred ground.

The final act of the day was one of community: a shared meal, simple and abundant, prepared by all who attended. Around these tables, stories emerged — stories of sorrow, resilience, love, and enduring faith. Those with lived experience of the Leprosarium, including individuals born there to parents with leprosy and those who were residents of the Leprosarium, offered heartfelt recollections. Some stories were painful — tales of children separated from their families, some never to be reunited — yet amidst the sorrow, there was also immense gratitude. Gratitude for the Sisters of St John of God and other religious who devoted their lives in service to the residents, and for the compassion that carried so many through dark times.

Thanks be to God that the stigma once associated with leprosy is now a relic of the past. Today, it is a disease that can be treated and managed with dignity and care. But the memories remain — and they deserve to be honoured. Of note, Sr Pat Rhatigan shared that thanks to the Leprosarium Sisters' regular celebration of Mass, catechesis, and the teaching of prayer and the Rosary, people returned to their communities with a strong love of the Catholic faith. In areas where parishes were not fully formed, the people who have lived in Bungarun and returned home kept the faith alive — gathering for prayer, teaching the Rosary, and forming faith groups. Mass might only be celebrated once or twice a year by a visiting priest, but the Rosary and community prayer sustained the faith between visits and still does to this day.

No words can fully capture the spirit and grace that enveloped Bungarun on Sunday. The Holy Spirit was truly present — moving among us, alive and powerful in the hearts of all who gathered. The Diocese of Broome continues to be a place of healing, remembrance, and unwavering faith.