

a homily preached at the

**Memorial Service
for Ngatai Lynette (Mellory) Manning**

**at St Luke's in the City, Christchurch
3.30 pm Monday 29 December 2008**

by Fr David Moore
parish priest

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Thank you for being here today, to celebrate the life of Ngatai Mellory Manning, to mourn her untimely, brutal dying, yes, yet even more so to honour her exuberant and loving living. We offer to you her family our heartfelt thoughts and prayers as you remember one of your own, and struggle to come to terms with the enormity of what was done to her.

It has to be clearly stated that no one deserves to experience the horrendous and inexcusable violence done to Mellory – including that person, or persons, as yet unapprehended, with blood on their hands. We do well to remember that the seeds of violence lie within every one of us. None of us is immune to the deep desire for vengeance, especially when confronted with a life extinguished so brutally. But the Christian gospel announces that true humanity, and thus complete freedom, is found when we sacrifice our need for vengeance – this is the meaning and purpose of the Christian symbol of the cross, and the content and teaching of the life of Jesus.

It also needs to be said that we are here in the memory of a person, not an object of media speculation. A God-created and God-loved woman – daughter, grand-daughter, sister, friend, colleague. No different from the rest of us in essence, full of desires and hopes, fears and anguish, joy and suffering, accomplishments and failures. The gossiping tongue all-too-easily slanders and stereotypes. Some careless and reckless comments have been made of late. Obviously, we are wise to disregard grand-standing and posturing, driven by very mixed and not necessarily honourable, or honest, motives. In the face of this and in defence of Ngatai as person we may be tempted to sanitise. But because all persons are equally loved, both slander and sanitising are unhelpful, since both prevent us from seeing the person-as-person, made in the image and likeness of God, equally the exalted and ordinary flesh in which the Divine finds a home – which is the message of this Christmastime.

One further thing needs to be said, that our capacity to see Ngatai as that fleshy home in which God dwells is marred by our very uneven judgment. When a banker or a futures trader dies they are not remembered for violating the Bible's prohibition against the taking of interest on money-lending. God willing, when I die I will not be remembered for violating the Bible's prohibition against hypocrisy, among my many other failures. In like manner, then, there is no justifiable reason why Mellory should be remembered for breaking a single Biblical prohibition. Those who presume to sit in judgment are at grave risk of failing to recognise the plank in their own eyes. Those sitting in judgement on matters to do with sexuality are especially at risk, concealing their own mixed motives and repressed selves. Christians seeking guidance in such matters look to the Jesus who criticised the religiously self-righteous and who preferred the company of the despised. We are compelled by the voice of Jesus echoing down through two millennia – those without sin may cast the first stone.

So having cleared away those things which prevent us honouring and mourning Ngatai as the fleshy home of the Divine, our vision may be cleared to see Ngatai more as God sees her. Our seeing is partial, easily swayed, frequently superficial, hardly objective. The Christian hope of resurrection is based not on how *we* see, but on how *God* sees. This conviction lies behind the Christian insight that there is nothing – neither brutal violence nor hypocrisy - that can separate us from the love of God. For this reason we can give thanks to God for Ngatai, for her living and loving, for her accomplishments and her failures, for the beauty God sees in her and the life God lives through her.

May she rest in peace, and rise in glory!