

Heeding the example of Florence Nightingale

David d'Lima - FamilyVoice Australia, September 2020

Florence Nightingale (1820 - 1910) is recognised as the founder of modern nursing. Following her excellent service during the Crimean War, in which she organised care for wounded soldiers whom she famously tended at night, Florence obtained the nickname - "The Lady with the Lamp" - based on a phrase from a report in *The Times* newspaper, which described her work as follows:

> *She is a "ministering angel" without any exaggeration in these hospitals, and as her slender form glides quietly along each corridor, every poor fellow's face softens with gratitude at the sight of her. When all the medical officers have retired for the night and silence and darkness have settled down upon those miles of prostrate sick, she may be observed alone, with a little lamp in her hand, making her solitary rounds.*

Florence experienced several calls from God in 1837, aged only 16, prompting a strong desire to devote her life to serving others. On one occasion, noted in her diary: "God called me in the morning and asked me would I do good for him alone without reputation". Florence had a very intense personal devotion to Christ, though some of her views were contrary to orthodoxy. She was highly active in philanthropy, caring for sick and poor people in her village.

After training in Germany, she worked in Britain but eventually went to care for soldiers wounded during the Crimean War. Florence immediately began work to improve the utterly appalling lack of hygiene at the British hospital in Constantinople, where more soldiers were dying of infectious diseases than battle wounds!

After Florence Nightingale sent a plea to *The Times* newspaper for government to provide better facilities for soldiers injured during the Crimean War, the British Government commissioned Isambard Kingdom Brunel to design a prefabricated hospital that could be built in England and shipped to the Dardanelles. The result was Renkioi Hospital that massively reduced the death rate among wounded soldiers.

After the war, Florence spent her money establishing St Thomas' Hospital, including the world's first nursing training school. Consequently, the nursing profession became recognised as a worthy vocation. Prior to that era, nursing was either provided by nuns (hence the term nursing 'sister') or (according to popular thinking) by drunken women with bad morals who lacked ability! Florence provided great wisdom for the care of patients, the running of hospitals and the reform of healthcare.

Her legacy continues in may ways, such as the Nightingale Pledge - a modified version of the Hippocratic Oath - which nurses recite at their pinning ceremony at the end of training. Created in 1893 and named after Florence Nightingale as the founder of modern nursing, the pledge (revised in 1935) is a statement of the ethics and principles of the nursing profession:

> *I solemnly pledge myself before God and in the presence of this assembly, to pass my life in purity and to practise my profession faithfully. I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous, and will not take or knowingly administer any harmful drug. I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession, and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping, and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling. With loyalty will I endeavour to aid the physician in his work, and as a 'missioner of health' I will dedicate myself to devoted service to human welfare.*

It is time to restore the vision for daily prayer as a source of renewal for ministry excellence, as recommended by Florence Nightingale, as follows:

> *We have been, almost all of us, taught to pray in the days of our childhood. Is there not something sad and strange in our throwing this aside when most required by us, on the threshold of our active lives?*