



Catholic Education Thanksgiving & End of Year Commissioning Mass

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 17 November, 2023
Chapel of St Michael Archangel, Leederville**

When the Church celebrates the feast day of one of our saints, we are offered the choice of using special scripture readings chosen for the particular saint or the readings of the particular day of the particular week in which the feast occurs. Normally the recommendation is to choose the readings of the day because this means, at least for those who go regularly to Mass during the week, that we are hearing a continuous reading both from the gospels and from the other writings in the Bible. This is significant because, as with most things in life, context is very important. A particular gospel passage, for example, is often best understood if you know what has just happened in the unfolding story and if you are able to also take account of what comes next.

Today, however, we have chosen the special readings for Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, and I am glad of this because it seems to me that both readings have something special to offer everyone who is involved in the work, the vocation and the mission of Catholic Education.

The most telling phrase is found in the first reading which, I want to suggest, provides a key for all of us, collaborators in the work of Catholic Education here in WA, as we reflect on the readings in tonight's liturgy. In the first reading the author of the first letter of Saint John says this:

If someone rich enough in this world's goods sees that a brother or sister is in need, but has a heart which remains closed to them, how could the love of God be living in that person?

This question applies very directly to Saint Elizabeth, of course. She was queen in what is now Hungary, so she certainly lived, or could have lived, a life of luxury. But as Queen she was acutely aware of the sufferings and destitution of many of her subjects and she set herself to put her own resources, and the resources of her kingdom, at their service.

We, of course, are not kings and queens, but we are certainly rich in many ways and we are called to put our resources at the service of the young people we are called to serve. As Catholic educators we have the greatest treasure of all - the treasure of our Catholic faith - and it is precisely this which we are called to offer as a gift of love and humble service to the young people who have been entrusted to us by their parents, yes, but also, and even more fundamentally, by God.



Catholic educators therefore bear an enormous responsibility for the young people who must be at the centre of all our Catholic education communities. This is obviously true of our schools and other educational institutions, but it is also true of our Catholic Education Office, our Catholic Education Commission, our Catholic Education parent groups, and our Catholic parishes. If we, who have been given the gift of faith and have accepted the invitation to work in our Catholic education system here in WA, close our hearts to our young people and do not offer them the precious gift of God's love, made known to us in Jesus, how could we dare to say that the love of God lives in us? How could we dare to look the parents of the young people in our schools in the face and tell them that we really are totally dedicated to the well-being and the flourishing of their children? And how can we hope to be finally and fully welcomed into the Lord's kingdom if we have not responded to his urgent call to us: *Let the children come to me, do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs?*

In today's gospel Jesus tells us that as His disciples we are called to give everything: to bless those who curse us, to forgive those who persecute us, to pray for those who wish us ill, and to put the needs of others, which in our case means our young people, before our own.

You all know as well as I do, how difficult a task this is. Like all high ideals, it is relatively easy to talk about but much harder to actually live out, day after day. But this is what the Lord asks of us. The final few lines of this evening's gospel spell it out in concrete terms: be compassionate; don't judge; don't condemn; be ready to forgive; keep on giving, even when you don't feel like it. And remember, especially when you feel discouraged or exhausted, that the amount you give will be the measure of what God will give to you.

This is where our discipleship of Christ, our following of Him, comes in, because it is simply not possible to be a Christian unless we recognise in Jesus the inspiration for all that we seek to do and all that we are trying and wanting to be. It is hard to live lives of selfless generosity and certainly, left to our own devices, we have very little if any hope of being faithful to the high ideals of our Christian faith and of our mission as Catholic educators. But as the first reading today reminds us:

*This has taught us love – that Jesus gave up his life for us;
and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our sisters and brothers.*

So, we need to partner with Jesus: we need to form a united team with Him. We need to do this in our families, we need to do it in our friendship groups, we need to do it in our local schools and colleges, we need to do it in our local communities. Jesus knows what it is to live a life of total self-giving. He learnt the hard way. He knows what it is to be exhausted, to be discouraged, to be frightened, to be disappointed, to be let down, to feel abandoned. But He also knows how to



confront the exhaustion, the discouragement, the fear and the disillusionment and to keep alive his hope and his faith. And He wants to walk with us through all of this so that we don't give up, and we don't give in, and we don't walk away. *"Come to me,"* He says, *"if you are weary or overburdened, and I will give you rest"*. When we feel like we are caught in a raging storm and in danger of sinking he comes to us and says, *"Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Have courage. Trust in me"*.

The most precious gift we can offer our young people is this gift of coming to know Jesus as the one who lets us into the secret of how much God loves us and how determined God is never to abandon us. It is the gift we are celebrating tonight as we honour those who have given so much of themselves to the young people of WA, and as we commission those who are determined to make sure that this gift will continue to be offered in the years ahead. This, above everything else, is the wealth, the richness, which we in Catholic Education have to offer our young people. How, then could we dare to say that the love of God is in us if we harden our hearts and refuse to offer this most precious gift of God to the young people of our time who are so much in need of this life-giving truth? They really are, especially in terms of their spiritual lives, often among the poorest and most abandoned. They are among the marginalised of whom Pope Francis speaks so often. We must not abandon them.