



Palm Sunday

Homily

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**Sunday, 13 April 2014
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

On the first Sunday after Easter Pope Francis will canonize Pope John Paul II as a saint of the worldwide Catholic Church. At the same time, he will also canonize Pope John XXIII, who called together the Second Vatican Council and in doing so in many ways transformed the Catholic Church. These two men are not being canonized as saints because they were popes. They are being canonized as saints because they both lived lives of extraordinary fidelity, faith, and commitment to Christ. This is the task of every Christian and both Pope John and Pope John Paul have shown us what this fidelity looks like in our modern world.

One of the things which links these two men is the fact that both understood that at the absolute heart of our Christian and Catholic faith there stands the person of Jesus. While our Catholic faith has many different dimensions and is very rich, in the end it is actually very simple: as Catholics, and this of course applies to all Christians, we are called to recognize that Jesus is the one we follow, that he is the one we serve, and that he is the one we are called to place at the heart of our lives. This was the teaching of the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII and it was also the teaching of Pope John Paul II. It is of course very much the same approach adopted by our new Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Pope John Paul once said something very important in this regard. He said that the basic task of the Church – which of course means the basic task which we all share as members of the Church – is to both speak of Christ to our world today and, even more importantly, to reflect the face of Christ, to show Christ, to our world. Indeed, we might say that our Church exists so that the world can continue to experience the love and presence and saving power of Jesus Christ today.

But for this to happen we as Christians must both know and love Christ. As Pope John Paul once said, “our witness (to Christ) would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face.” This is very striking. The Pope doesn’t say that our witness will be incomplete, or less than perfect, or a bit unsatisfactory, if we have not first contemplated the face of Christ. He says that it will be hopelessly inadequate.

This takes us to the very heart of our faith. We Catholics believe, we know with the certainty of our faith, that in Jesus we have so much more than a good man who lived a wonderful life and left us a remarkable legacy and a powerful teaching. He is all that of course but, much more



importantly and essentially, we know that Jesus is the revelation of God. He is God with a human face. And because of that, and because he has risen from the dead, he is not just a great man from the past. He is a living presence today filling our lives with his love. As we contemplate his face, as we gaze on him in the gospels, we are seeing into the very heart and mind of God himself.

Today then, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and begin Holy Week, that final week in which we remember the last days of Jesus' life and look forward to the joy of Easter, we are invited to look carefully on the face of Jesus.

We watch as he enters Jerusalem, receiving the enthusiastic welcome of the crowds but knowing, at the same time, that they will turn against him and that his entry into Jerusalem is in fact his entry into death.

We watch as he sits at the table and shares a last meal with his disciples, giving them the bread and wine, which are his body and blood broken and spilt for them and for us.

We watch as he travels that terrible journey from the room of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane and eventually to the hill of Calvary where what happened at the table in symbol will happen in reality: his body will be broken on the cross and his blood will be poured out in death.

And what do we see as we watch Jesus in these last days? We see a man who is determined to give everything, who is prepared to hold nothing back, who is ready to suffer humiliation, and hatred, and ridicule and, finally, who is prepared even to die, because of love. There are many explanations for Jesus' death – the jealousy and fear of some of the Jewish leaders, the betrayal of Judas, the cruelty and bloodlust of the Roman army, the cowardice of Pontius Pilate – but in the end there is only one explanation. Jesus gave his life for us because he loved us so much that he would not stop proclaiming the truth about who God really is, even though he knew it would cost him his life.

As we look on the face of Jesus in Holy Week and see there nothing but love, we know that we are seeing directly into the mind and heart of God himself. No failure, no mistake, no weakness, or betrayal on our part can destroy God's love for us. In giving us Jesus, who offers his life for us, God gives everything to us and for us.

The question is: what are we prepared to give in return?