



Farewell for Sr Philomena – Homily

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

Wednesday, 5 February 2014

As we gather this evening for the Mass of Thanksgiving in acknowledgement of the extraordinary contribution Sr Philomena has made to the life of our Archdiocese in general, and to Maranatha in particular, the readings offer us some powerful material for reflection, both on Sr Philomena's contribution and on the role we are all called to play in the life of our Church.

Before turning to those readings, however, I would like to recall for all of us some really basic elements of our faith. This seems to me to be especially appropriate as we think about the role of the Maranatha Institute in our Archdiocese, because Maranatha has focused for a long time on the area of adult faith formation and has sought to do so, I think, in response to the call of the Second Vatican Council for an active and responsible participation of everyone in the life and mission of the Church. As a religious, Sr Philomena will agree, I am sure, that the equipping of the laity to better serve the mission of the Church is one of the most important and urgent tasks in the Church today.

When I was appointed as Archbishop just on two years ago, the Church in Australia was in the middle of the Year of Grace. As you all know, at the heart of this initiative was the conviction that the Church in Australia must, if it is to be faithful to its vocation, once more place Jesus consciously and explicitly at the centre of everything we do as a Church and everything we seek to be as a Church. Based in many ways on the Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, the Year of Grace had as its inspiration these words from that letter: "our witness (as a Church) will be hopelessly inadequate if we have not first contemplated the face of Christ". When I was a young novice for the Salesians, I remember our novice master quoting to us a famous Latin maxim – *non dat quod non habet; you cannot give what you have not got*. We cannot be the people God is calling us to be if we are not seeking to know Jesus better, in knowing Him come to love Him more deeply, and in loving Him seek to serve Him. Sr Philomena, as a Presentation sister and as director of the Maranatha Centre, has been instrumental in helping to bring this dream for the Archdiocese alive – and perhaps one of the



great challenges for you, Sr Philomena, and one of the frustrations, too, has been the fact that there is still so much to be done in this area of our life as a Church.

In stressing once again that Jesus stands at the heart of our faith and that, in the end, the only gift we have to offer is Him, I am reminded of another contribution which Pope John Paul has made to our understanding of ourselves as a Church. When we read his writings and revisit his talks, we discover that one of his favourite descriptions of the Church was this: the Church is the community of the disciples of Christ. It seems to me that this completes the picture. Yes, Jesus is the heart of our faith, but it is the faith of a community, of a people, rather than the faith of isolated individuals who need only be concerned about their individual relationship with Christ. It is as a community of brothers and sisters, who accept and rejoice in our mutual interdependence on each other and who accept our mutual responsibility for each other, that we come to know and love and seek to serve Jesus; that we become, in other words, His disciples. And, once again, it is this vision of community, so central of course to your life as a religious, Sr Philomena, which has informed so much of what you have sought to achieve in your time as director of Maranatha.

As we rejoice in and acknowledge your great contribution this evening, the readings of this evening's liturgy do point us to the source of your strength and of our strength as a Church community: they point us to the grace, to the loving presence of God among us. And, lest we start to congratulate ourselves too much on our achievements, we are reminded that we are members of the Church, members of Christ Jesus as St Paul puts it, not through our own choice or our own initiative but through God's choice and God's action in our lives. We cannot claim credit for the wise decisions we have made, or the good qualities we have displayed, or the holiness that has at times marked our life, or for the freedom with which we have embraced the opportunities we have had, for, in the words of our first reading, "Jesus is our wisdom, and our virtue and our holiness and our freedom". Once again, Paul is reminding us to keep our eyes firmly fixed where they really belong: not on ourselves but on Christ. As he says to us, if we want to boast at all, then let us boast not in ourselves but in the Lord.

The last thing we might say perhaps is a word of sincere thanks for the example of faith, commitment and fidelity which you, Sr Philomena, have given us. Of one thing you and we can be sure: you have never been ashamed to give witness and testimony to your faith in the Lord, the Son of Man, and He will not be ashamed of or disappointed in you when He comes, as tonight's Gospel puts it, in His own glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

You have been a gift to our Archdiocese and to the vital work of adult faith formation in particular. As you look to a new stage in your journey, you can be sure that we will accompany you with our gratitude, our support and our prayer.