



Centenary Mass - Homily

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

St Michael's School, Bassendean
Saturday, 24 May 2014

I'm not sure if it is just an accident, or perhaps the working of Divine Providence, which leads to our celebrating the centenary of St Michael's School here in the parish of St Joseph, on the day in which we also celebrate the feast day of the patron of Australia, Our Lady Help of Christians. As today's Gospel has reminded us, Mary was given to the Church by the Lord as He was dying on the cross, precisely to be both our mother and our helper. We can be sure that she has accompanied the growth and development of St Michael's School and, indeed, of the whole parish, over the past 100 years with her prayers. We could do no better today than to entrust the future of the school and parish communities to her, and of course to the prayers of St Joseph and St Michael as well. In our Catholic tradition, we often speak about the communion of saints and this, of course, is what it means in practice: we don't travel the journey of faith alone. We have the comfort of the prayers and the presence of the great saints of our tradition to support us.

As we gather this morning in this church and in this parish in which the school has played and continues to play such a major role, it is good for us to look back with pride and gratitude on everything that has been achieved in this parish and in this parish school over so many years. The pioneers who built the parish and the school, the people who have supported it in the years since, the religious, the priests and, of course, the teachers, parents and students who have been such an important and central part of its story: these are people whom we should remember with gratitude and, in a special way perhaps for those who have died, remember in our prayer. In doing so, of course, we are reminded of the words of St Paul who once wrote to the Christian community in Corinth: "is there anything you have which you have not received as a gift?" (cf 1 Cor 4:7). In the end, it is to God that we owe our gratitude and our thanks. God is the source of everything good in our lives and we are, as a Christian community, always invited to know and remember who it is to whom we look for all that we have and need. The last 100 years have been an unending sign of God's goodness to us.

As well as looking back, however, we also look around us at our present and we look forward to our future. We do not know what that future will hold and, at times, that uncertainty may cause us apprehension and fear. At this present time in our Church's history, this might be especially the case. And yet, though we do not know our future, we do know our God. He is made known to us, fully and finally, in Jesus and it is Jesus who says to us, today, as we gather in this church, "I am with you always until the end of time". It is a promise, of course, which He makes not just to this community of faith gathered here in Bassendean but to the whole Church across the world. Jesus assured us that the Holy Spirit would be with us as a community of His disciples and would lead us into the fullness of



the truth. This is what the Lord has been doing in the Church for the last 2,000 years. He is not about to abandon us now.

One hundred years ago almost to the day, on 30 May 1914, Archbishop Clune, who blessed and opened the new school which also doubled as the parish church on Sundays, explained the reason for the school's existence in these words:

“That side by side with secular instruction or education imparted, the child's heart is moulded in habits of piety, its lips in habits of prayer, its mind impregnated with the truths of our holy faith.”

Now, 100 years later as the present Archbishop of Perth, I would want to say something similar although I would use different words. St Michael's School exists because it is a work of this parish and of the Archdiocese of Perth: it is a work of the Church and a contribution of the Church to the health of our society. The school also exists because it is supported by the parish, by the parents who choose to send their children here, and by the principal and the staff of the school. But, most of all, the school exists because we all have a fundamental conviction that we want to give our children the very best education we possibly can and we are convinced that an education which somehow or other sidelines the question of God and the importance of God in our lives can only ever be a partial and inadequate education. Parents want to give their children the best, and the best we can give them absolutely includes an understanding of the extraordinary love God has for them and for everyone.

For 100 years, St Michael's has been helping our children to come to know God's love by coming to know Jesus better. For 100 years, the school has responded to Jesus' insistence that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. For 100 years, the school has been forming young people to be generous, to be compassionate, to be forgiving and to be grateful to God for all His gifts. It has done so, and continues to do so, in partnership with the parents who choose to send their children here to school and who, like all parents, want their children to be formed and educated in the same values the parents themselves hold dear.

Today, then, is a day for thanksgiving – to God first and foremost – and then to all those, parents, teachers, other staff members, religious and priests who have allowed God to work through them to touch the lives of countless young people and help them to live the rich and fulfilling lives that God created them to live.

Today is also, of course, a day for optimism and hope as we look to the future. The school continues to thrive and children continue to be educated, not just, as Archbishop Clune would have said, in secular instruction, but also and more fundamentally in the truth that they are created by God, loved by God and called by God to live lives of dignity, integrity, generosity and faith. We have so much to be grateful for.

I began these few words today by referring to the fact that we are celebrating the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Let me finish by recalling this again. Just as Jesus said to St John at the foot of the cross, “Son, behold your mother”, so may I say the same to all of you. Behold your mother. Entrust yourselves and, for parents in particular, entrust your children to the protection of her prayers. She has been given



to us by the Lord as a guide and as a helper. She more than anyone can help us to know and understand Jesus better. We can afford to rely on her.