



2014 LifeLink Christmas Appeal Launch – Homily

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Last week, there was a short but quite beautiful story reported in the media about Majella Catholic Primary School, one of two Catholic schools in the Mirrabooka parish. The school caters for a large number of refugee families and other families under considerable financial stress. One young teenager became aware of the difficulties faced by many families in the school and organised to raise enough funds to buy each child in the school two new pairs of shoes. As a response to this wonderful initiative, the students at Majella decided that, while they were not in a position to raise money for a worthy cause, they could still express their gratitude by giving some time each week to visit the children in another nearby school which caters for students with disabilities.

I was very moved by this story of generosity and gratitude. I am sure that the young man who had the inspiration to raise money for new shoes in the first place had no idea that his generosity would, in turn, unleash a wave of gratitude in the boys and girls, and their teachers, at Majella. We can only wonder what flow-on effects there will be in the lives of the children at the school the Majella students visit. We worry sometimes about what some people have called the spreading contagion of evil. The story I have just shared with you should give us hope and remind us that there is also a spreading power of goodness. And this, of course, is not surprising: goodness and generosity are very attractive and, I think, highly contagious.

Tonight, as we formally launch the Archbishop's Christmas LifeLink Appeal, I would like to invite us all to reflect on this link between generosity and gratitude. I don't know what inspired the young teenager to do what he did, but I do know that his generosity was deeply appreciated by the community at Majella Catholic Primary. This appreciation and gratitude expressed itself in a further act of generosity. We might say, in fact, that it was gratitude, deeply and sincerely felt, which gave birth to generosity. This is a deeply Christian instinct and a deeply Christian reaction. As a Catholic community, we know that the Eucharist, the Mass, is the very heart of our lives of faith. The word "Eucharist", in fact, means "thanksgiving". Every time we gather to celebrate Mass, we are caught up in a great act of thanksgiving, a great expression of gratitude, to God for all His wonderful gifts, especially the gift of His Son. If our celebration of the Eucharist is real and sincere, then it, too, will lead us to live our lives generously, demonstrating to the Lord in practical ways our recognition of His goodness to us.

As I reflect on the quality of gratitude, I can't help thinking that it may be, at least partly, what Jesus meant when He said, "how blessed are the poor in spirit, for the Kingdom of heaven is theirs". Poverty of spirit means, I think, a deep realisation that all we have, even if we have worked hard for it, is, in the end, a gift from God. We are not independent, self-sufficient individuals. On the contrary, we are children of God. It is God who gives us our life in the first



place, together with whatever skills and talents we might have which enable us to live our lives fully and achieve sometimes great things. As St Paul puts it in one of his letters, "What do you have that you have not received? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" Of course, it takes real honesty and real humility to acknowledge that our achievements and our successes are, in the end, not our doing at all but the playing out of God's grace in our lives. But, once this realisation takes hold, a sense of gratitude will begin to grow within us and this, in turn, will impel us to be generous, sharing all that we are and have with others, who are as much God's much-loved children as we are.

Your very presence here tonight is a sign that this quality of gratitude and generosity is very much alive in you. You have put yourselves forward to do what you can to make this year's Christmas appeal a success. Through your efforts, and the generosity you help foster in your parish communities, the lives of many, many people will be brighter at a time when loneliness, poverty, and even despair can be more keenly felt than at other times. Because of your generosity, fewer parents will have to look into the sad eyes of their children because they are unable to give them any gifts on Christmas Day. Fewer people will worry themselves sick over what they will do for food over the Christmas season. Fewer people will be isolated because they cannot afford to travel to visit their families. Fewer people will be tempted to believe that all this talk of peace on earth and joy to the world is nothing but empty words.

On behalf of Bishop Don and myself, therefore, I want to say thank you to all of you for your generosity, your enthusiasm and the goodness of heart which has brought you here tonight. I hope and believe that your own celebrations of Christmas, and those of your parish communities, will be richer because of your readiness to make sure that the people of our state really do experience the presence of Christ at a time when we celebrate His coming among us.

Thank you and God bless you.