



Institution of Acolytes – Homily

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Tuesday, 30 September 2014

Tonight's first reading, from Paul's second letter to Timothy, provides all of us with a very clear pointer as to the way in which we might reflect on what we are doing here together in the Cathedral this evening. "From the Holy Scriptures," Paul tells us, "we can learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." In this way, he goes on to say, a "man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work".

For all of you tonight who will be formally instituted as acolytes for service in the Church, these are both encouraging words and a guide for you to follow. Open yourselves to the wisdom of God, as it has been revealed to us in Jesus, and made known to us in the pages of the Gospels, and you will become, more and more, equipped and ready for all that God is asking of you. Your ministry will bring you great joy but there will be times when it also brings challenges and disappointments. After all, you are being formally commissioned for service in the Church: you will, in a way that hasn't been true in quite the same way before, become men of the Church, more closely identified with a Church which is at the same time profoundly holy, a work of God, but also marked very deeply by the frailty of its members. For that reason, you will need to remember that your position in the Church, and especially in the liturgy, must be lived with the mindset of St John the Baptist, namely that "He, Jesus, must grow greater in people's lives, and I must grow smaller". You will need to remember that your ministry has no other purpose than for you, again like John the Baptist, to point away from yourself and towards Him, constantly saying, not just in words but in the way you conduct yourselves, "Look - there is the lamb of God - follow Him".

If John the Baptist can be a good role model, a good patron saint, for you, then so can Simon Peter, who features so prominently in tonight's Gospel. This is one of the last passages written in the Gospels. It comes at the end of John's Gospel, which was the last of the four Gospels to be written, possibly as many as 70 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The writer is drawing on the whole Gospel tradition as he tells this beautiful story. The disciples are on the shore of the lake, still overwhelmed by the horror of the death of Jesus and the wonder of His resurrection. They decide to go fishing but they catch nothing. Then Jesus, who is there on the beach, tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They do so and catch more fish than they can manage. We, who know the Gospel story, realise that this has happened before. It happened when Jesus called His first group of disciples and told them that they would become fishers of men, not simple fishermen working for their livelihood. The writer of the Gospel is inviting his readers, and therefore inviting us, to reflect on the ways in which God has called to us and given us a task for the spreading of His kingdom. This is true for every single person here but, as acolytes, you



have been called in a special way and given a special task. Jesus is taking you up, in a new way, into His mission of salvation, His mission of revealing the true face of God. You will need to know Jesus well if you are going to be able to reveal His face to others.

Peter recognises Jesus in tonight's story and jumps over the side of the boat in his enthusiasm to get to Jesus. This is not the first time this has happened. Once before, Peter did the same, in the midst of a raging storm, as Jesus came to the disciples over the water. On that occasion, Peter made the fatal mistake of taking his eyes off Jesus and he began to sink. Tonight, through this Gospel reading, all of us here, but especially you who will be instituted as acolytes, are being reminded to keep your eyes on Jesus. He is the one who will enable you to be faithful to all He is asking of you. He is the one who will protect you from the dangers which are always a part of a call to any form of ministry in the Church. And, of course, He is the one who will, if you feel yourself to be sinking, reach out His hand, hold you up and lead you to safety.

As the story in tonight's Gospel unfolds, Jesus sits down with His disciples to a meal of bread and fish. We are invited to remember another meal of bread and fish, when Jesus fed over 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. On that occasion, the disciples gave Jesus the little they could gather together, He took it and offered it to His Father in heaven, and then He gave it back to them to give to the crowds. As ministers in the Church, and especially ministers at the altar, you will need to remember that it is the Lord who is at the heart of the Eucharistic meal we share. We bring our little to the altar, but it is His gift we give to His people. This gift is a gift of His grace, a gift of His love. It is, in fact, His gift of Himself. Tonight, I want to ask you all to continue to develop and deepen your own understanding of this precious gift. When we hold the host before the eyes of the one who is to receive it, and say to them, "The Body of Christ", we must allow that moment, no matter how many times we experience it, to be a renewal of our own faith. It is the Lord Himself whom we offer to His people. We must never become blasé or complacent about it.

Although the last part of the story has not been read in tonight's Gospel, the story really finishes with Jesus asking Peter three times, "Do you love me?" After all his failures, all his denials, all his stumblings, Peter is finally able to say with passion and with absolute conviction, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you". In the end, this is what matters. The Church has nothing to offer but the gift of Jesus and the joy of an encounter of love and friendship with Him. A Christian, more than anything else, is someone who seeks to know Jesus more completely, to love Jesus more deeply, and to serve Jesus more faithfully. As acolytes, as ministers in God's Church, you take on the daunting task of modelling for God's people what a real Christian, a real disciple, looks like. As you prepare to step forward for your formal installation as acolytes, the Lord asks the same question of you as He asked of Simon Peter, "Do you love me?" As you search your heart for your answer now, my prayer for each of you is that, as each day goes by, you will be able to say, with more and more passion and conviction, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you".