



**40th Anniversary of the Centre for Faith Enrichment
Homily**

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

Redemptorist Monastery, North Perth
Sunday, 6 November, 2016

I don't know if any of you have ever had the experience of hearing, as if for the first time, a phrase from the scriptures which in fact you have heard countless times before. This happened to me recently when, at St Charles Seminary for the installation of one of our seminarians as an acolyte, I encountered a line from St Paul's letter to the Philippians which has stayed with me since. It comes in chapter three which, like so much of Paul's writings, opens up for us new dimensions of the mystery of Christ. "*I believe,*" writes St Paul, "*that nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord*" (Phil 3:8).

This phrase came to me again as I reflected on today's Gospel. The passage we have listened to appears towards the end of Luke's Gospel. Jesus has arrived for the last time in Jerusalem and enters into a dialogue, and often a confrontation, with the religious leaders over a number of issues: buying and selling in the temple, paying taxes to Caesar, and the question of religious authority are just some of them. These confrontations will of course play a large part in leading the religious leaders to seek to destroy Jesus. Indeed chapter twenty of Luke's Gospel, from which today's reading comes, has been immediately preceded by these words: the chief priests and the scribes, with the support of the leading citizens, tried to do away with him, but they did not see how they could carry this out because the people as a whole hung on his words (Luke 19:47-48).

How can we explain this vehement opposition which Jesus provoked in some people, and especially among the elites of the day? No doubt there are many possible answers to such a question but in one way or another they all point to one common factor: the person, and the actions, and the teachings of Jesus were a threat to something which was very dear to those who opposed him, namely their certainty that they had God all worked out and that they had nothing further to learn.

This was certainly the case for the Sadducees, who were so certain of their belief that there could be no such thing as a resurrection from the dead that they sought to humiliate and ridicule Jesus by creating what they thought was an absurd scenario which showed just how foolish belief in the resurrection was.

They were right of course in suggesting that the scenario was absurd. Jesus agreed with them. But then he pointed out why it was so absurd. It was because the Sadducees had presumed that any possible form of life after death would be simply a continuation of life before death. Their religious imagination could not conceive of something more. They were locked in a narrow vision of life, and of God.



This episode captures perfectly the challenge of Jesus to the people of his own time and to the people of our time: the challenge to you and me. Are we prepared to accept - are we ready to dare to believe - that the mystery of God revealed in and through Jesus and continued in the teaching and ministry of his Church is greater, and deeper and richer than we have yet understood or grasped? Are we in other words open to being stretched in our faith, humbled by the mystery and beauty of our faith, open to the infinite horizon of our faith, or are we, like the Sadducees and like so many other people we encounter in the pages of the gospels, including at times the closest of Jesus' disciples, determined to stay closed in our own rigid ways of seeing and doing and understanding our faith?

Perhaps yet another way of asking this might be: are we open to the adventure of experiencing the supreme advantage of truly knowing Christ Jesus, our Lord, as he reveals the unimaginable depths of the mystery of God to us?

In the Archdiocese of Perth, for the last forty years, many dedicated people have committed themselves precisely to this challenge. The Maranatha Institute, which has now given birth to the Centre for Faith Enrichment, has grown and developed as the archdiocese has grown and developed and as the Church has continued along the path laid out for it at the Second Vatican Council and clarified in the life and experience of the Church in the 50 years since then. Many things have changed in the Church and the archdiocese since the Maranatha Institute was founded 40 years ago, and things will continue to change in the years ahead, but one thing hasn't changed and will never change: the Church, and this Archdiocese, and the Centre for Faith Enrichment, are all grounded in the unshakeable conviction that nothing can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, our Lord.

It is my belief that, as each year goes by, the Centre for Faith Enrichment becomes more and more important for us. Together with other agencies and organisations in the archdiocese it seeks to provide opportunities for people to deepen, to enrich, their faith. For me, it is a vital part of the dream I have for the people of our archdiocese: that we can, together, grow in our desire and our determination to walk in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd. This is why, as we thank God for the last forty years, years of faith-filled commitment on the part of so many, I also want to look to the future. The world in which we live, and in particular our part of it in this south-west corner of Australia, is in desperate need of Christ. Our faith tradition is bold enough to proclaim Jesus as the Way, as the Truth, and as the Life. This is what he said of himself and we take him at his word. We are convinced that for everyone of God's children there is no greater advantage to be had than to know him as our Lord.

For all those who have been a part of the story of Maranatha, now the Centre for Faith Enrichment, over the last forty years I express my own gratitude and that of the whole archdiocese. To those who now and into the future will continue this wonderful legacy I thank you for your commitment. Help us to put Christ back where he belongs: at the very heart of everything we do and say and try to be as his Church, his living body, here in our Archdiocese.