



Mass for the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Come to me, listen to my words, put them into practice and you will be like a person who has built his or her life on solid foundations.

These words of Jesus, which find so many echoes throughout the whole of the gospel tradition, point us once again to the fundamental truth that unless we have Jesus at the very heart of our faith, and unless we are contemplating his face and listening attentively to his voice, then our faith runs the risk of being shallow and our lives run the risk of failing to produce the fruit the Lord is looking for from us.

Because this is true of the whole Church it is also true for the Equestrian Order of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre. This morning, as we once again celebrate the gift which this order is to the Church, and as we welcome new members, I want to encourage you all to welcome into your own hearts, and into the life of the order, the words with which St John Paul II began his pontificate nearly forty years ago: Do not be afraid. Throw open the doors of your heart to Christ.

In this Year of Mercy this call from Pope John Paul, which has been echoed by Pope Benedict and now by Pope Francis, becomes even more insistent. For our present Holy Father to open your heart to Christ is to open your heart to the one who is the face of the Father's mercy. Every page of the gospel confirms this truth. In this year in which we are reading the Gospel of Luke each Sunday at Mass this becomes especially clear. It is Luke's gospel which has the parable of the Good Shepherd, for example. We know it well. "What man among you," asks Jesus, "having a hundred sheep and losing one would not leave the ninety-nine and go in search of the one?" When we remember that Jesus was speaking to people who lived very close to the land we can well imagine the answer. "I certainly wouldn't do that," they might say, "because while I was away searching for the lost sheep there would be no one to look after the other ninety-nine. They too might wander away and then I would be left with nothing. It is just not worth the risk." This of course is the point of the parable. God does not make calculations when it comes to reaching out to us with his love, forgiveness and compassion. He simply acts to envelop us in his mercy.

St Luke's gospel also contains the parable of the "Prodigal Son". Again we know it well. The younger son, arrogantly and offensively, demands that his father give him his share of the inheritance. This young man couldn't wait to get his hands on his father's money. Off he goes to live the high life and only comes to his senses when he is in the gutter and has nowhere else to go, no further to sink. Rather calculatingly he prepares a speech aimed at softening his father's heart in the hope that his father will take him back. When he eventually arrives home his father sees him coming, runs out to meet him and before the son can even finish his speech his father



has thrown his arms around him. Although he doesn't do so on this occasion Jesus could well have begun this parable with the words, "What father among you, having a wayward son" Many fathers perhaps would say, "Well, of course I would be glad to have him home, but I certainly would not be throwing a party for him. How will he ever learn if I act as if nothing had happened? It is just not worth the risk". And again, this is the point of the story. God does not make calculations or weigh up risks. God simply envelops us with his forgiveness and healing mercy.

Yet another famous parable found in St Luke's gospel is the parable of the Good Samaritan. I won't repeat it here except to remind us that it is the story of the Samaritan, a despised foreigner as far as the Jews were concerned, who reached out to a man in desperate need, in striking contrast to the Jewish priest and the Jewish Levite, two religious figures, who shamefully walked past on the other side of the road, ignoring the man's terrible plight. Jesus finished the parable with these words: go and do the same yourselves.

When we open the doors of our heart to Christ this is the Christ who seeks to come in. It is this Christ who says to us, in this morning's gospel,

Come to me, listen to my words, put them into practice and you will be like a person who has built his or her life on solid foundations.

God calls us all to follow him and to walk the path of discipleship. We are asked to do so in the concrete reality of our own situation and according to the gifts God has given us. The question I would invite each of you to reflect on today is this:

In leading me to my association with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre what is the Lord asking of me as I seek to be a disciple of Jesus, the face of the Father's mercy? How can my belonging to this ancient order shape my response to the Lord so that, through me, he can continue to be present to others with his love, his compassion, his forgiveness and his never-failing mercy? The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre will continue to be an important gift to the Church as long as its members never lose sight of this question and of the fundamental truth that, like the Church herself, the Order will lose its reasons for existing if it takes its eyes off Christ.