



## **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)**

### **Concluding Mass for CYM 2017 Veritas Festival**

#### **Homily**

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

The University of Notre Dame Australia, Drill Hall  
Sunday 2 July, 2017

This morning was kind of a Q&A session and one of the questions I was asked was something like this, 'What's three things you would like to do in order to change the church for the better, to change the church in Perth or Australia or even the world?' I did say the best thing I could do would be for everyone to go for Richmond, but that didn't go down terribly well, so I moved on to something else.

I also said the best thing that I could do or would most like to do, is to help everybody, particularly people in the Church, to put Jesus at the heart of our faith. I am absolutely convinced that our Catholic faith makes no sense at all and so it won't make sense to other people, unless we understand that at the heart of the faith, stands the person of Jesus.

I presume you all know that the name of the festival that we are presently bringing to a conclusion, is the name Veritas. The word Veritas means truth. It happens to be a part of my motto as the Archbishop of Perth. My motto as the Archbishop of Perth is 'Via' which means the way, 'Veritas' which means the truth and 'Vita' which means the life. But of course that's the way Jesus described himself. He said to his disciples on the night before he died. A night that was perhaps the most important night for him where he was giving expression to what was deepest in his heart. He said – 'I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life'.

I wanted to underline that for you today as we bring our festival to a close. All sort of things have happened since Friday night, there have been lots of insights that people have gained. Lots of things that people perhaps have come to understand better; moments of deep prayer. At the heart of it all, there must be the person of Jesus or we have missed out completely on understanding what our Catholic faith is all about.

Sometimes when we think about what it means to follow Jesus, we remember all the nice things he says. Like, 'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest' which is very inviting and comforting. Or when he says to the woman who had been caught in the act of committing adultery, 'I am not going to condemn you,' and we allow ourselves to hear him say the same thing to us, that's a really encouraging thing. Or when he meets Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus who was the tax collector was robbing his own fellow countrymen blind.



When he meets Jesus, Jesus doesn't get mad at him, instead he says, 'I am coming to your house tonight.' That was an encouraging thing to hear. When we hear those kinds of things, we might tell ourselves, let's be followers of this wonderful man who has so many good and encouraging things to say. This may not always be so easy. For example, when we hear him say things such as what was in today's Gospel – 'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me, is not worthy of me,' or 'Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me,' and 'Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me.' All of a sudden we start to understand that following Jesus will have moments of challenge, being faithful to Jesus and his Church will present moments of real difficulty where we are going to need a lot of courage. One of the reasons why we put so much effort into having a thing like the Veritas Festival is because we want to help people build up their courage, their sense of trust, and their commitment to the Lord. So when you find that tough times come along, you don't give in.

That's why I was so pleased to see the theme of this year's Veritas Festival, 'He who is Mighty has done great things for me'. These of course are words that Mary spoke to her cousin Elizabeth when she went to visit her, after learning that she was about to conceive and have a child and that her cousin Elizabeth, who was way too old to think about having children, was also going to have a child.

Mary said she greeted Elizabeth and then burst into this beautiful song called the 'Magnificat', and the words of our theme come from that beautiful song that Mary sang. But it's good to remember what preceded that trip to visit her cousin. It's good to remember what she must have been carrying with her in heart as she was out on that journey from Nazareth to where her cousin lived. What preceded of course is the story of the Annunciation where Mary is visited by an angel who tells her that she is going to become the mother of Jesus.

We might look back now and think that must have been fantastic news for Mary to hear, but at the time it wasn't. She was only a young girl and not married. Then an angel appears to her and what's Mary's reaction? – the Gospel of St Luke tells us - she was frightened. We might even say in our language today – she was scared to death. Well, you would be if an angel turned up on your doorstep and you weren't expecting them.

That doesn't happen to most of us but sometimes in different ways, God steps into our lives as He may have done for some of you during this weekend and begins to turn everything upside down. Shakes a little bit all those things that we thought we knew, and begins to put challenges to us that we are not sure we want to accept.

Mary's first reaction when God stepped into her life in this new and confronting way was to be scared. Then the angel tells her – Do not be afraid. They are words that appear over and over and over again in the Gospels. This time on the lips of an angel but also on the lips of Jesus himself - Do not be afraid. Often Jesus would go on to say, 'Do not be afraid because I am with you.'

I want to say the same thing to each one of you as you leave here today to go back home, most of you won't be going back to school or university because it's holidays – but in facing whatever comes next in your life – 'Do not be afraid because God, the Lord is with you.



In the story of the Annunciation, the angel goes on to explain to Mary what's going to happen – you are going to conceive and have a child and call him Jesus, and he's going to be the son of God. Again, we might think we would love to hear news like that where we are going to do something so important, but Mary was very confused as the Gospel tells us.

Mary said to the angel, 'How can that happen, that doesn't fit in with what I had thought God was going to ask of me, this doesn't make any sense to me.' So Mary started out frightened, then she found herself confused because what God was asking of her, didn't seem to fit in with what she thought she should be doing with her life.

If that hasn't been your experience yet, I'm sure that one day in one way or another it will be. When all of a sudden if you are listening to God in anyway at all in your life, He will ask something of you that you are not so sure about. How this could be? You might say to yourself, surely God is not asking this of me. When I committed myself to being a disciple, I did not realise that this was going to be involved.

So the story of Mary is the story of each one of us, sometimes when God steps into each one of our lives it can be a little bit frightening, it can be overwhelming. It wasn't what we expected. And then as we grow in our understanding of what God is asking of us, we might get a little bit confused. We might think to ourselves – I don't have what it takes to do this. I have never prepared myself to do what God is asking of me. How am I going to do any of this?

You probably know that at the end of the Annunciation story, Mary says some very famous words that have become an indication as to why she is so important for us in our Catholic faith. She said – 'Behold I am the servant of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.'

That's a great act of faith, for a young woman who started out as frightened and then became confused. Mary eventually reached a point where she could say - here I am, I am ready to do whatever the Lord asks, I am the Lord's servant. Let anything that the Lord wants be done in my life.

How did she get there? How did she get from being frightened and confused to the point where she could give her yes to God's plan for her? The answer is in the words that the angel says to her and they are the very same words that in one way or another that has been said to every single one of us. The words that form part in a sense of what happened at your Baptism as what the second reading said today. The angel said to Mary, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Most High God will cover you with its shadow.'

If we had been there, we might have seen Mary give a big sigh of relief. Because all of sudden she understood that this enormous thing that the Lord was asking of her, didn't depend on her courage or her abilities or talents, it depended on the power of God working in her life. And it was because she listened to those words and believed them, she said – here I am a servant of the Lord ready for whatever God might ask of me.

This I think, is a big challenge of every single one of us because being a faithful Christian, being a faithful disciple, being a faithful member of God's Church isn't always easy. There are all sorts of challenges. Many of you would have friends who think you are crazy for having anything to do with the Church and make life hard for you and criticise you and make fun of you sometimes



because you are trying to be a faithful Catholic. It's not always easy, we can get a bit frightened by the pressure of other people.

We can let ourselves become confused as people start throwing up all sorts of doubts about what the Church is on about, what we are supposed to be doing or not doing, but we need to remember when those times happen that the words that the angel said to Mary are the words that are said to us at our Baptism, Confirmation and each time we open our hearts to the Lord. The Holy Spirit is with you, the power of the Most High God covers you with its shadow, so don't be afraid, I am with you. Hang on, be faithful.

That's the message that I hope will ring in your hearts that you will take away with you today, maybe reflect on in the days ahead and recall at those times when the just seems to hard, to be faithful to stay true to stand up to what you believe.

Look around you at all the people who are here all on the same journey, all trying to be faithful to God, all with our own struggles and difficulties, and remember that you are not alone. There are many people who don't speak up loudly all the time but who share your convictions and share your faith and share your hopes. Draw courage from each other, support each other and remember the Holy Spirit is with you and the power of the Most High God covers you with its shadow.