



2018 Opening Mass - Newman Catholic College

HOMILY

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

Br Terence Oval, 216 Empire Avenue, Churchlands
Thursday 8 February, 2017

We are gathering here tonight in this beautiful setting, to ask for God's blessings on all that lies ahead in 2018 for the students, the staff and the families who together make up the Newman College community.

In doing so we are also entrusting ourselves, and the year ahead, to God, expressing our firm faith that God will journey with us and, to the extent that we are open to his grace, make 2018 for each one of us a year of growth, of deep peace and joy, and of renewed hope. All around our state and across Australia schools will be celebrating the opening of a new school year in a variety of ways. One of the things which makes Catholic schools unique, is that we choose to do so by celebrating the Eucharist together.

In doing so we give expression to our belief that a Catholic school without God very consciously at the heart of everything is a school which is failing to live up to its very reason for existing and, because of this, failing its students and their families. The Eucharist is all about our conviction that God, in Jesus Christ, is present to us, with us and in us. For Newman College, a school in the Marist tradition, this takes on a special significance. One of the five pillars of the Marist approach to education is the idea of presence: God's presence to us in Jesus, and what this calls us to in terms of our presence to each other.

As God's presence to us in Jesus is life-affirming, compassionate and merciful, challenging and supportive at the same time, and always leading us more fully into the mystery of God's love, so our presence to each other, as staff to students, as colleagues to each other, as parents to children, as friends to each other, and as a school community to our wider society, can be the same. My prayer for all of you this year is that together you can be present to each other in this life-affirming way, and that you will experience together that love and presence of God which is poured out so freely and so fully on all of us.

For every one of you, including those who have been part of this school community for some time, 2018 marks a new beginning. New beginnings are always exciting, full of promise and hope, but often also a little daunting. I imagine this is especially true for those of you who are new to the College, either as students, staff or parents, but I suspect that most of us, when something new begins, approach it with mixed feelings.

There are many ways of coping with the stress and uncertainty of new beginnings and I am very confident that your school has many things in place to make it as easy and as enjoyable as



possible for you. But more than anything else I hope that the knowledge that the Lord Jesus is with you, and your experience of his presence through each other, will be of great support and encouragement to you all.

As this new school year gets underway, we find ourselves here in Perth, and throughout Australia, celebrating the Year of Youth. This is an initiative of the Australian Catholic Bishops, who wanted to mark the tenth anniversary of the World Youth Day held in Sydney in 2008. It also corresponds with the decision of Pope Francis to call for a special Synod, or meeting, of the world's bishops in October of this year in Rome, to reflect on what the Lord is calling the Church to do and be for young people at this time in our history.

When Pope Francis announced his decision to call this Synod he explained that he wanted to help the Church accompany young people on their journey towards adulthood so that, through a process of discernment, young people could discover their plan for life and realise it with joy. It seems to me that for students this is a very good description of the role your school is meant to play in your life. Of course the school exists first and foremost to offer you the very best education possible. Using all its resources your College will do everything it can to provide you with committed and caring teachers and support staff, with the most up-to-date curricula, with the widest possible range of extra-curricular activities, with excellent facilities, and with a pastoral care program that is suited to your needs and helps you meet your goals. And the school will do all of this because it wants to help you as you journey towards adulthood, discover and develop a plan for your life, and live that plan, that dream, with enthusiasm, confidence and joy. I think it is fair to say that this is what your teachers want for you, it is the reason why your parents chose this school for you, and presumably it is what you most want from the school yourselves.

Your school, then, is all about life, your life, both as you live it now and as you hope to live it in the future. We might say that your school exists so that you can have life and have it to the full, both now and in the years to come.

This of course is exactly the way Jesus once described his own mission, his own life's work. *"I have come"*, he said, *"so that you might have life and have it to the full"*. Everything the Church engages in, and this includes our schools, is geared towards this: to help people live the gift of life they have received from God with integrity, with enthusiasm, with hope and with joy, and to do so by opening up their lives to the Lord who seeks to be a life-giving presence to everyone.

With all of this in mind, and with this new school year ahead of us, may I ask you, the staff of this College, to place the young people of this school at the heart of your work and of your professional lives? Help then to understand the beauty of the gift of the life God has given them. Share your wisdom, and the wisdom of the gospel and of the Church, with them so that they can learn how to make life-affirming decisions as they grow older. To you, the parents and families, I ask that you stay engaged with your sons and daughters during this time of formation and education so that the school can support you in every way possible as you accompany and guide them on their journey to adulthood. And to you, the students of this College, I want to ask that you be full of hope, open to everything the school can offer you, and ready to grow into young men and women whose lives are enriched and fulfilled by knowing that the Lord is always present to you and in you.

May God bless you all.