



**Parish Visit Banksia Grove
Mass and Blessing of Church Site and Foundation Stone**

Homily

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

**Sunday 11 November 2018
St John Paul II Banksia Grove Parish
79 Joseph Banks Blvd, Banksia Grove**

When I was sent to Rome as a young priest in 1990 to undertake further studies in theology, I arrived in Rome – my first significant trip overseas – on January 1, New Year's Day, the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God. I vividly remember being driven by taxi past buildings and monuments I had never dreamed I would actually see in person. I recall being overwhelmed as we drove past the Colosseum thinking of the many Christians who had died there and of the fact that I was in the Eternal City, so important to all of us who belong to the Lord's Church.

On that first day, although I was tired after such a long trip, I could not settle so after lunch, armed with a map of a city I had never been in before, I set out to explore and eventually found myself in the public square in front of the Lateran Basilica. I do not know if any of you have had the chance to go there but certainly, on any visit to Rome, this great Basilica, and the other great churches of Rome, are places worth visiting. Next year, along with the other bishops of Australia I will be there as part of the meeting of the Australian bishops with the Pope. I will certainly remember this parish in my prayers at that time.

The Lateran Basilica, dedicated to St John the Evangelist and St John the Baptist, is known as the Mother of all the Churches, primarily because it contains the Cathedra, the seat, of the Bishop of Rome. This Basilica, more than St Peter's in the Vatican, is in fact the pope's true Cathedral. It was therefore the Cathedral Church of the patron of your parish, St John Paul II.

In the square outside the Basilica there stands a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi together with a small group of his first friars. This statue commemorates the visit of Saint Francis to Pope Innocent III, who lived at that time at the Lateran palace. St Francis was seeking approval from the Pope for his small group of followers, those whom we today know as the Franciscans. When Francis first appeared dressed in his beggar's robes before Pope Innocent he was regarded as crazy and ordered out of the pope's audience hall. But that night the Pope had a dream in which he saw the pillars of the Basilica beginning to topple. Suddenly, out of nowhere, this small beggar came running into the basilica, put his shoulders up against the pillars of the basilica, and stopped the building from collapsing. The next day Pope Innocent summoned Francis again and approved



his order. The Franciscans were born and grew to become one of the most significant groups ever raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church.

This dream of Pope Innocent recalls the famous vision St Francis himself had had some years before when, while praying before a crucifix hanging in a deserted and crumbling church in the countryside around Assisi, Francis heard a voice that seemed to come from the figure of Jesus on the cross. The voice said to him, “*Go and rebuild my Church which is falling into ruin*”. Francis at first thought the Lord was asking him to repair that one deserted church building. Only later was it realised that the Lord, through Francis, was calling forth a miracle to help renew the whole Church, which had in many senses lost its way. Francis and his Franciscans had found their mission.

As we grapple with the many difficulties which confront the Lord’s Church at the moment, we know that many people believe the Church to be experiencing a crisis at least as major as the one facing the Church at the time of Saint Francis and Pope Innocent. We rightly focus on the difficulties facing the Church today, which we cannot ignore in the hope that they will go away, but we should also focus on what is at the heart of the story of Saint Francis. It is this: **in times of crisis the Lord does not abandon his Church**. On the contrary he raises up people who will allow him to work through them to bring renewal and wholeness to the Church whose fundamental identity, as the Body of Christ, has been so disfigured by the failures of so many. Saint Francis would have been judged originally to be the most unlikely and unsuitable of solutions to the Church’s problems at that time. We should be prepared to be equally surprised by the ways in which the Lord chooses to work in our own time to rebuild his Church.

The renewal, the rebuilding, of the Church cannot happen without the renewal and rebuilding of our parish communities. Today, on this very special occasion, we are blessing and site for the new church and the foundation stone which will be incorporated into the new church. You are all excited and so am I. It is a momentous day in the life of this young parish. You will build the church, I know, with enthusiasm, with hope, and with pride. You will watch with eager anticipation as it takes shape. You will look forward to the first Mass, the first baptism, the first wedding. You will hope and pray that it will be a place of beauty and dignity worthy of the Lord who will come among you in the Eucharist and live among you in the Blessed Sacrament. But today I want to ask you to also wonder in what ways you can as a parish community really take to heart the words of the Lord to St Francis: *go and rebuild my Church for it is falling into ruin*. Listen together to the whisperings of the Lord in your own lives, just as St Francis did. And let your enthusiasm and anticipation as you watch the church building rise up before your eyes lead you to commit yourselves, with the same enthusiasm and anticipation, to the task of building a true Catholic community of faith in this parish, a community whose gospel beauty outshines even the beauty of the new church which will soon be the centre of your faith and worship. This is the real vocation of this parish and perhaps it can be summed up in some words from your own parish patron: **do not be afraid – throw open the doors of your hearts to Christ**.