



Chrism Mass

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Tuesday 16 April 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

I want to begin my homily this evening by reassuring you all that I have not got my Christmas and my Easter mixed up.

I say this because over the last few weeks, as I have been thinking about this homily, a particular verse of Scripture has come very strongly to me. It is the verse from the prophet Isaiah which says, *"The people that walk in darkness has seen a great light. On those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone"*.

As this year has unfolded, many of us may well have felt as if we were engulfed in darkness and that we were stumbling and lost in the land of shadows. For all of us who together make up the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Perth, whether we be members of the laity, of religious life or of the clergy, it must feel as if we have been walking together our own *"via crucis"*, our own way of the cross. Perhaps in ways that have never been as true before, we find ourselves crying out with Jesus, *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned us?"* The suffering has been and continues to be real and painful. We cannot ignore it or minimise it or pretend that it doesn't matter.

Tonight, however, I want to remind us that Jesus is also remembered as crying out on the cross, *"Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit"*. Pain, and hope and trust, can exist together. It all depends on who it is in whom we place our trust and faith.

As Christians we place our trust in the one who said to his disciples, *"Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"*. And as Catholic Christians we place our trust and faith in this same one who called his first disciples, formed them into a community of faith, and established them as the foundations of his Church, his living body, the community of believers in and through whom he continues to be present to this world as our saviour and as our God. It is this community which is called to be the light that dispels the shadows, the light that chases away the darkness. This is our privilege and our responsibility. It is also the vocation to which we often fail to respond. In the end we can only be this light if we are faithful: our infidelity deepens the darkness and casts longer shadows. Tonight's Mass then is an urgent call to fidelity; an urgent call for us to live in the light and reject the powers of darkness that threaten to overwhelm us.

When God sent his Son, born of a woman, he stepped into our human history so that in Jesus we might see the face of God, learn to know and love him, and commit ourselves to his way. Through this mystery of the incarnation our humanity became not an obstacle to holiness but the way to holiness. We will not find our way to God by rejecting or stifling our humanity but rather by



embracing our humanity and living it to the full. But the story of our broken humanity and the story of our own broken lives reminds us that the good things God gives us, even the very gift of life itself, can betray us if we do not welcome these gifts with gratitude and use them with integrity.

It is because God loves our humanity that he comes to us through the created realities of our lives and of our world in order to lead us to holiness. Tonight, we consecrate the Chrism and we bless the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick so that these precious oils may be used in the sacramental life of God's Church. It is our faith that through these tangible things, through oil and of course through water and bread and wine and other things, God encounters us, and strengthens us, and heals us, and makes us holy. But what we sometimes forget is that all the sacraments of the Church are, first and foremost, moments of encounter with the Lord Jesus. In the end he is the only light which can dispel the shadows and chase away the darkness. If we together as the Church are to be the living sign of the presence of Jesus, the light of the world, we can only do so as long as we are one with him, united with him, faithful to him, walking his way, living his truth, sharing his life. This is why the Lord calls people into his Church; why he has called us. He wants us and needs us and expects us to let his light shine in our lives so that people may discover him as they encounter us.

This is what it means to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people. And it is within this great mystery of the Church that we recognise the precious gift of the ordained ministry. What God is asking of us as a people is beyond us if we rely only on ourselves or on each other. We must rely on Christ who is our Good Shepherd and our Servant Leader. And so from among us God chooses men and calls them to be sacraments, living images, of his presence to his people. Through the lives and ministry of our clergy Christ feeds us and heals us; forgives us and strengthens us; finds us when we are lost, gathers us together, and shows us the way. Our deacons, priests and bishops are just like the rest of us: they have their talents and limitations, their strengths and weaknesses, their demons and their angels, their successes and their failures. But most of all they are our brothers who have given their lives for us because they heard the Lord's call and had the courage to say "yes". We owe them our gratitude, our understanding, the benefit of our advice, our wisdom and our encouragement and even at times our admonishment and our forgiveness. But we cannot ask as much as we do of these brothers of ours if we do not at the same time care for them and love them. They will be able to give us their best if we are able to give them our best.

And so tonight I ask all of us here in the Cathedral, the lay people, the religious, the deacons, the priests, and the bishops to pray together for God's holy Church in this Archdiocese of Perth. Let us pray for ourselves and for each other. Let us ask God to bring healing and hope and renewal to this archdiocese. Let us pray that we can live and grow in fidelity to all that God is asking of us. Let us pray that we may all be able to centre our lives in Christ, welcome him as he comes to us in the sacraments, encounter him in our moments of silence and personal prayer, and recognise and serve him in the faces of those who suffer. We are the holy people of God; we are a royal priesthood whose life is given for the salvation of others; we are the body of Christ, together bearers of his love for his people. May our celebration tonight make us more deeply and truly who and what we already are, so that the world might know the love of God and come to the knowledge of this astounding truth.