



Holy Thursday 2019

Homily

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

**Thursday 18 April 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In the Old Testament, in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses is recorded as asking the people of Israel:

What other nation is there that has its gods so near to them as our God is to us?"

Moses was speaking of the way in which God used his power to free the Israelites from Pharaoh and of the way he led his people through the desert to the Promised Land; the Israelites knew God was with them because by night they were accompanied by a pillar of flame and by day by a pillar of cloud.

The presence of God to his people was remarkable, but it was only a hint really of the depths of God's desire to be with his people. That desire was fully realised in Jesus who as our faith assures us is God among us as one of us. We no longer need to encounter God in fire and in cloud. Now we encounter him in person - in Jesus. We meet him in the pages of the Gospel, both when we read the gospels at home and when we listen to them proclaimed at Mass. We meet him in our fellow Christians, especially when they themselves are in love with the Lord and reveal his face to us by the way they talk and behave. But most of all, we meet him in the Eucharist when we gather, as we have tonight, to do what Jesus did on the night before he was betrayed. Just as on that night he took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, *"Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is my body which will be given up for you"* so at every Mass the priest, who is the living sign of Jesus among us, will do the same. And just as Jesus took the chalice and offered it to his disciples saying *"take this all of you and drink from it for this is the chalice of my blood which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins"* so the priest, in Jesus' name, will do the same.

The priest a little later will lift up the consecrated host, the Lamb of God, and call us to come forward for the supper of the Lamb. And in response we will step out of our seats and approach the altar. At that moment it would be good to remember the words of Jesus in St John's Gospel: *"When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself"*. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist the Lord fulfills this promise: he draws us to himself so that we can do what he invites us to do in another part of John's gospel: *"Make your home in me as I make my home in you."* And then, as we return to our seats we will know how truly Moses spoke when he said *"what other people has its gods so close as our God is to us?"*

Why has the Lord given us this remarkable gift? It is an important question and takes us to the heart of our faith. Indeed we can ask the same question about the gift of faith itself. Why us? The



answer really runs through every page of the gospels. *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”; “those who do not take up their cross and follow me are not worthy of me”; “it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven”; “love one another as I have loved you”; “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”*. These are extraordinarily high demands and they only scratch the surface of what the Lord asks of us. How can we possibly hope to reach the standard Jesus sets for us? The answer is, of course that we can’t – or at least not on our own. As Jesus himself reminds us, *“Without me you can do nothing”*.

Because of the Eucharist we are, or need never be, without him. He gives himself to us as food and drink and through the Eucharist unites himself to us in such an intimate way that he begins to live within us. As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, *“I can do all things in him who strengthens me”*.

There is something God-given within each of us which urges us to do more and to be more. At times that something gets corrupted and rather than wanting to do and be more we find ourselves wanting to have more. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that our happiness and fulfillment ultimately depend on what we have. But really our ultimate happiness depends on our living our lives as God intends: with integrity, with honesty, with generosity and with compassion. This is what it means to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. And in the depths of our heart I suspect we all want this: to be able to live, and love, and care, and forgive, and give, as Jesus did. Selfishness ultimately brings nothing but loneliness and self-loathing. Generosity and love sets us free. If we allow ourselves to be united with Christ in the Eucharist, and week by week, as we gather each Sunday, welcome him into our lives, then we will begin to see with his eyes, and listen with his ears, speak with his words and love with his heart. He will make his home in us and through his presence enable us to be all that he is calling us to be.

Tonight, then, in a special way, I pray that the words of Moses might find a place in the hearts of each one of us: *What other people is there that has its gods so near as our God is to us?*