



Second Sunday of Advent 2019

Homily

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

**Saturday 7 December 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Many of you here in the Cathedral tonight will know the hymn *Come As You Are*. It is a very popular hymn across Australia, sung in many parishes. The writer of this hymn, Fr Paul Gurr, an Australian Carmelite priest, is the composer of another hymn, less well known, called *Faithful Cross*. It is of course a Lenten hymn, focusing as it does on the death of Jesus on the cross, but it has an Advent relevance, too, as every dimension of the Season of Lent does. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of the Lord at Christmas. It is a time of anticipation, of hope and of joy – and this is just as it should be. But it is a time, too, for reflecting not just on the fact that the Lord came to us, born as a baby in Bethlehem, but for reflecting on the deeper question of why God sent his Son to us as one of us.

Paul Gurr's Hymn, *Faithful Cross*, in very simple words, leads us into this mystery.

When God's time had come to fullness, the words of the song say, Jesus Christ was born for us.

All his godhead he surrendered; he became as one of us.

Child was he of Mary's goodness, born in flesh on earth to die.

Born to die: this is true of all of us, of course, but not all of us are called to die as Jesus did, in agony and shame on an instrument of torture. Our Catholic tradition has always taught, and still teaches, that Jesus died to save us from our sins. How the death of one man two thousand years ago can save us today from our sins is part of the great mystery of our faith – we may not fully understand it but it is what we believe and it is what makes us Christians.

I was led to reflect on all of this as I read over the words of today's first reading. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of a new world in which there is no danger, no harm, no hurt, no injustice; of a world in which there is harmony, integrity, faithfulness and true knowledge of God. It is a passage full of hope because it looks to a world so different from the one in which we seem to live: a world where we can be forgiven for thinking that honesty and gentleness, respect and care, are often in short supply. We live in a world, in other words, which is marked by human sinfulness and



therefore desperately in need of saving. It is into this world that Jesus comes, a helpless infant, yes, a man who will end up dying on a cross in shame and apparent failure, yes, but one who, in his weakness and suffering is, as Saint Paul would say, the power of God and the wisdom of God. And it is this suffering, and this power, and this wisdom, that saves us.

Of course Jesus, whose coming two thousand years ago we will soon celebrate, still comes to us today. And just as he did two thousand years ago he still says to us today, *"I am the Way – follow me; I am the Truth – believe in me; I am the Life – live in me and let me live in you"*. We celebrate Advent and Christmas not just once in our lives but every year because, try as we might, we find it so hard to follow him, to believe in him, and to live in him. Each year we need to renew again our commitment to him. But even in our struggles and our infidelity we must never give up, because he never gives up on us. The promise of a new world and a new life, the longing for which is so obvious in the words of the prophet Isaiah, and which also lies deep in our own hearts, will be fulfilled in us – but only to the extent that when he comes into our lives, in all the often strange and unexpected ways that he does so, we are ready to greet him, to welcome him, and to follow him.

This evening we are joined by many young and not so young pilgrims, who have travelled to Perth for the Australian Catholic Youth Festival, which in a sense begins with this Mass but which will really begin in earnest tomorrow morning. I want you to know how very welcome you are among us. You are one of the ways in which the Lord is calling to the Church in Perth, calling to us, and encouraging us to have hope, both for the future and for the present. As Christians we can, together and relying wholly on the Lord's grace rather than on our own talents and abilities, be builders of a different world, a new world where, in the words of the psalm this evening, justice will flourish and so will fullness of peace forever.

May the Lord be with all of you, pilgrims here for the Youth Festival, over these days of celebration and joy. May you discover the joy of the gospel, the excitement of sharing your faith with each other, and the adventure of saying "yes" to the Lord's call to you in your lives, whatever that call might be. We will be praying for you over these days – please pray also for us.