



4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

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

**Sunday 3 February 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Some of you may remember last Sunday's Gospel reading which told the story of Jesus beginning his ministry by preaching in the Synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus' home town. Today's Gospel begins where last Sunday's Gospel left off: with Jesus in the Synagogue. When he says, at the beginning of this morning's reading that *"this text is being fulfilled even as you listen"* Jesus is referring to some words from the prophet Isaiah which Jesus used as the basis of his teaching and which he applies to himself. Those words speak of the one whom God will send to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to the blind new sight, and to the downtrodden freedom. There are many possible answers in our long Christian tradition to the question: why did God send Jesus? We can learn a great deal about Jesus by reflecting on these answers and understanding how they apply to our own lives. But perhaps we should give special prominence to the answer Jesus himself gave: that his word is good news for us and that this word carries with it the promise of freedom – freedom from our blindness and stubbornness of heart, freedom from the oppressive power of evil and sin, freedom in fact from all that is imprisoning us and preventing from living our lives fully. On another occasion in the Gospel tradition, Jesus will simply put it this way: *I have come that you might have life and live it to the full.*

There is a real challenge for us all here, particularly at this time in the history of the Church in Australia. As Christians, and perhaps particularly as Catholics, we find that so many of the fundamental convictions of our faith are no longer widely shared in the broader community. Many are of course, the European culture which was brought to Australia with the arrival of the British and the Irish was profoundly shaped by the Christian faith. Successive waves of migration have often both deepened and broadened this Christian foundation. We have only to look around us to recognise, and rejoice, that our Catholic community is a multi-cultural one. We are enriched by the depth of faith of Vietnamese and Filipino Catholics to give just two example out of the many I could mention.

In spite of this however, the society of which we seek to be an active and engaged part is rapidly moving away from so much that is at the heart of who we are. The profound sense of our mutual responsibility for and belonging to each other, for example, which finds its origins in our belief that



every human person is made in the image and likeness of God, is challenged by the idea so common today that every person is a totally free and autonomous individual who can make whatever decisions suit him or her, with no real concern for or reflection on the impact of those decisions on others. People sometimes criticise the young people of our time, dismissing them as the “me” generation, but I wonder if we would be closer to the truth if we acknowledge that we live, all of us, young and old, in a “me” society. Often, unconsciously, we buy into this mindset ourselves, unaware of how opposed it is to our Christian faith.

How are we, as the Catholic community, meant to respond to this reality? How are we to find our rightful place in our society, living as active and committed people, active and committed **Christians**, concerned for the common good of all? As always there are many answers to questions such as these, but there is a sense in which for us the answer is quite simple: we are disciples of Jesus called by the witness of our lives to be those through whom he continues to be present and active in our world. If Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, then today he seeks to do so through us. If he came to set people free from all that was oppressing them, today he seeks to do so through us. If he came to open people’s eyes and ears to the truth about God’s extraordinary love for his people, today he seeks to do so through us. If he came so that through his presence people might be enabled to live their lives to the full, then today he seeks to be present to others through us.

This is what it means to be the missionary Church about which Pope Francis so often speaks. This is what it means to go out into the world carrying the Good News with us and sharing it as widely and generously as we can, rather than simply confining our living of our faith to the hour we spend at Mass on the weekend, absolutely vital though this is. It is what it means to become what all our efforts at renewal in this archdiocese are trying to achieve: that we become, each day more and more, a people who walk together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.

In the end it is all about committing ourselves to the task of bringing alive the command of Jesus, given to us at the Last Supper: *Love one another as I have loved you*. Perhaps then today we can give the last word to St Paul and leave the Cathedral this morning with his words ringing in our ears: *There are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love*. How, today, am I going to witness to this truth in my life?