



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

Homily

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

**Sunday 3 November 2019
St Mary's Cathedral**

As many of you would know, here in the Archdiocese of Perth, we are engaged in implementing a plan of renewal for the Church which began about three years ago and which, in its present form, is due to come to completion around the time that the formal sessions of the Plenary Council will take place. The theme of the Plenary Council, a solemn gathering of the whole Church in Australia, is *"Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church"* while the aim of our renewal here in the archdiocese has been and continues to be that we all become together, more than we are already, *a people who are walking together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.*

When the six key themes of the Plenary Council were determined following a very wide consultation throughout the whole Church in Australia, it was decided that each theme, which is in the form of a question, should begin with these words: *what does it mean to be a Christ-centred Church which is* – and each particular theme then follows.

I do not want to reflect directly on the six themes this morning – they can be found on the website of the Plenary Council and I would encourage you to search them out. Rather I want to reflect, in the light of this morning's Gospel, on what ties our Archdiocesan Plan of Renewal and the Plenary Council together. It is of course the realisation that at the heart of any renewal in the Church, a deeper fidelity to God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus, must be our primary goal.

It is a fundamental truth of our faith that God is made known to us, fully and finally, in Jesus, who is God among us as one of us. Because Jesus is, in our traditional language, fully divine, when we enter into communion with him, and come to know him, we are encountering God and being drawn into the mystery of God. At the same time, because Jesus is fully human, *"like us in all things but sin"* as the scriptures express it, then in him we discover what it is to be fully and truly human as God intended in giving us the gift of life in the first place.

This is why our weekly celebration of the Eucharist is so important. As we hear, week after week, the story of Jesus unfolding for us through the reading of the gospel, we are being invited to reflect on not just what Jesus says and does but, even more importantly, what every incident of his life reveals to us about the attitudes of mind and heart which animated everything about him. To grow



in our understanding of Jesus is both to grow in our understanding of the depths of God's love for us, and to appreciate more and more clearly what we, as disciples of Jesus, are being called to. *You must have in you the same mind that was in Christ Jesus*, Saint Paul tells us in one of his letters – but how are we to know his mind if we do not know him? And how are we to know him if we do not know the gospels?

Today's story of Zacchaeus offers us a remarkable insight into the mind and heart of Jesus. As Saint Luke tells the story it is clear that the local townspeople have heard of Jesus' impending visit because a large crowd has gathered to see him. Zacchaeus, the local tax-collector, is too small to see over the crowds so he climbs a tree in order to see Jesus passing by. As a tax-collector, Zacchaeus worked for the hated Roman occupiers, and the anger of the townspeople towards the Romans would have been directed especially at him. Zacchaeus would have been rejected, ignored, constantly attacked verbally if not physically, and completely isolated. As a significant religious leader Jesus would probably have been expected by the people of the town to similarly condemn Zacchaeus, or at least take him to task for preying on his people and apparently getting rich at their expense. But rather than do this Jesus instead treats Zacchaeus with respect and encourages him to come down from the tree because he, Jesus, wants to come home with Zacchaeus and spend time with him.

For a man who had for so long been treated with contempt and anger by his neighbours, such an approach by Jesus, an approach marked by compassion and understanding rather than anger, must have been overwhelming, and very surprising for the townspeople. We might even say that such an approach had the potential to be life-changing for Zacchaeus – and Saint Luke makes clear that this is exactly what happened. Zacchaeus offers to give half his property to the poor and to pay back anyone whom he has cheated in any way - and not because Jesus has shamed him into it but because Jesus has treated him with respect.

The contrast between the attitude of Jesus and the attitude of the townspeople couldn't be more marked. Their anger and their disdain did nothing to change Zacchaeus or to relieve the oppression of their own situation. The compassion of Jesus, on the other hand, changed the heart of Zacchaeus. His life was turned around, and so was the life of the people, for they were to be the beneficiaries of his new found generosity and integrity.

It is very easy for us to act out of anger, or resentment and sometimes for good reason. People do hurt each other, cheat each other, degrade each other and exploit each other. We all know this to be true. But the way of Jesus, the way of God, is not to give way to anger or resentment or a desire for revenge but rather to look with eyes of mercy and compassion on those who do us harm – and then act accordingly.

If we are to have the same mind, and heart, that was in Christ Jesus, we will have to allow him to work this transformation within us – for we certainly cannot do it on our own. Today then, as we approach the altar to receive and welcome him in Holy Communion, we might ask him for the



grace to see with his eyes, to hear with his ears and to love with his heart. This is what it means to walk in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.