



Catechists Commissioning Mass

Homily

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

**Thursday 14 November, 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As I was preparing for this evening's Mass, two lines from the Gospel to which we have just listened jumped out at me.

The first is the insistence of Jesus that "*the Kingdom of God is among you*". These words of Jesus are important for every Christian disciple, of course, but they are especially significant for those who, through God's grace, have come to understand more deeply how important our Catholic faith is. You, as people who have accepted the vocation to be catechists here in our archdiocese, are certainly numbered among such people. Your willingness to say "yes" to the invitation to take up this challenging role, in spite perhaps of your doubts as to how well equipped you are for such a task, is a testament to your faith and to your recognition that faith is not a possession to be jealously guarded but rather a gift to be shared.

When we consider all the challenges being faced by the Church today, particularly in the area of morality, and we realise that things we might once have taken for granted are no longer universally accepted - things such as the sacredness of human life, or the importance of children being brought up in a family with their mum and dad wherever possible - we might wonder whether what Jesus said about the kingdom being present among us is really true. I have often reflected on the fact that when I was a young person growing up in the 1950s and 1960s the values of our society were generally the same as the values of my family and of the Church. In such an environment it was a little easier to believe, or at least to hope, that God's Kingdom really was present. To a large extent this is no longer so. While we know that our society is built on the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we also know that we can no longer really call ourselves a Christian society. We are certainly not a society resting securely on the foundations of Christian faith.

As people who are being called to share with the young the beauty of being part of the Kingdom of God you therefore face a much more difficult task than that faced by those who were catechists before you. It is no longer obvious to many people that the Kingdom of God exists or indeed that God exists. While many people profess to be believers in one way or another, or in one thing or another, so many people including, I am sure, the families of some of the children you teach, live lives of what we might call practical atheism. They believe in God, and may well turn to God in



times of crisis, but they live their day-to-day lives with little or no thought of God, and often make major life-decisions with no reference to God.

This may sound a little bleak – and in one sense it is – but we as Christians are people of hope. We believe that all the questions of life – questions which people ask today as much as they ever did – find their answer ultimately in the God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus. And it is because of this conviction, and because you care so much for the well-being of our children and our young people, that you generously put yourselves at their service, doing your best to open their eyes and ears and hearts to the wonder and beauty of our faith.

That this is not always easy or well-accepted is part of the reality we face, although so, too, is the way in which so many of our children and young people show real openness to learning about the God who loves us, who sent Jesus among us, and who lives in his Church so as to be always close to us. But this cross of apathy, or even rejection, is surely part of what Jesus was referring to when he spoke in tonight's gospel of the suffering and rejection which he himself was to experience and which we, as his disciples, will also encounter.

In the midst of the challenges we will inevitably face, that sharing in the passion of Jesus which is part of the life of every disciple, it is good for us to remember this: as Jesus said to his first disciples, so he says to you tonight: *You did not choose me; I chose you and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last (John 5:16)*. And because he has chosen you, you can be sure that just as Peter and the disciples encountered Jesus in the midst of the storm on the lake of Galilee, so Jesus will come to you and say to you the same words he spoke to them: *Have courage, I am with you. Do not be afraid (Matt 14:27)*.

Thank you for all that you do for the children and young people of this archdiocese and for their families. Thank you for being faithful witnesses and true disciples of Jesus. May you continue to experience the strength of his grace and the gift of courage and wisdom given by the Holy Spirit. So do not be afraid: he is with you.