



**Mass for 29th Sunday Ordinary Time (Year A)  
Introductory Remarks**

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

**St Francis Xavier, Windsor Street, Perth  
Sunday 18 October 2020**

I am very glad to be with you this morning to celebrate this Mass for the 29th Sunday of the year and also immediately after Mass to bless the new memorial garden which sits between the church and the Emmanuel Centre.

2020 has been, and continues to be, a strange and difficult year. Certainly for me the opportunities to visit local parish communities and celebrate the Sunday Mass with them has been significantly restricted and for that reason I am especially glad to join this community this morning. The weekly celebration of the Eucharist is meant to be for all of us the most important event of the week. We bring ourselves, with all our gifts and all our limitations, to the Lord; we offer ourselves to the Lord; and we ask God to draw us into a closer union with him so that we can then leave the church at the end of Mass and go out to be what we are called to be: A living sign that the Lord Jesus continues to be with his people through his Church.

I will also be glad to bless and dedicate the memorial garden immediately after this Mass. Not only does it enhance the beauty of the church and its surroundings but it also offers so many people, especially those who come to the Emmanuel Centre, a place of peace, a place of silence, prayer and reflection, and a place particularly to remember those we have loved who have been called home by the Lord.

For those who make use of the Emmanuel Centre, including those who have suffered hearing loss, among those who will be remembered in a special way today is Father Paul Pitzen. It is almost two years to the day that Father Paul died and his loss is still felt deeply by many people. We pray for his eternal rest today, as we do for all our loved ones, and we once again entrust Fr Paul to the Lord. May he rest in peace.



## Homily

Today's Gospel reading presents us with one of many stories in the gospels which show Jesus in dispute with some of the religious leaders of his day. The story makes it clear that these religious leaders are trying to discredit Jesus by forcing him either to support the Romans and thus offend his own Jewish people or support his own people and thus show himself to be a revolutionary who is agitating against the Roman occupiers. While these Jewish leaders are undoubtedly a minority - we must not imagine that all the religious leaders of Judaism in the time of Jesus were against him - they do demonstrate a remarkable level of hostility to Jesus. We might well reflect on this. Why did Jesus arouse such negative feelings against him in some, and perhaps many, people? Why was his message of peace and forgiveness and compassion so bitterly resented? What was it about him that led some of his opponents to seek his death?

This is the great mystery of evil as it confronts goodness, and while we might look back with amazement at the way Jesus was treated we might also reflect that sometimes in our own lives the same pattern repeats itself. Sometimes we too meet hostility with compassion and with gentleness. But equally, sometimes when we meet compassion and gentleness we become intimidated by it because it shows up the lack of compassion and gentleness in our own lives, and we push back against it.

This is the remarkable thing about the gospels: they are not just about the past; they are also very much about the present, and if we are honest with ourselves we will often find ourselves reflected in the gospel stories.

Unlike us, Jesus does not allow himself to be drawn into the trap set for him by these religious leaders. Instead, as so often happens, he turns the situation to his advantage in the hope that these people, who are so hostile towards him, might be challenged by his words and begin to see the evil that is at work in their hearts.

When Jesus asked for a Roman coin and then put the question to the religious leaders, "Whose image is found on this coin?", he uses the Greek word *icon*. It is the same word we find at the very beginning of the Bible when in the Book of Genesis we are told that God made human beings in the divine image and likeness. In other words God made human beings to be living icons of God's own presence in the world.

This can help us understand what Jesus really means when he says, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" - that is, give to Caesar whatever bears the image of Caesar - and give to God whatever bears the image, the icon, of God for this, more than anything else in creation,



belongs to God. This is a very significant statement about the dignity of every human being. Every one of us, no matter who we are, no matter where we come from, no matter how talented we are, how gifted we are, how frail or damaged or broken or struggling we are, is made in God's image, and for that reason alone worthy of the most profound respect. This is the basis of the Catholic Church's unshakeable belief in the dignity, equality and supreme value of every human person, of every human life.

To say that we are made in the image and likeness of God is already to say something very remarkable and very beautiful. But when we begin to ask ourselves what this actually means, it becomes even more remarkable. In the chapter from the first book of the Bible where we read that we are made in God's image and likeness we also come to understand that it is the creating, and the life-giving, and the loving God in whose image we are created. In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis God makes everything else firsts and then, almost as if he leaves his masterpiece to the end, God makes us - and it is only us, only human beings, who are made in God's image and likeness. What this means, I believe, is that we are most fully the people God created us to be when we are being life-givers and sharers of love – and, of course, the opposite of this is to be life destroyers and causes of disunity and discord and hate.

This morning's gospel, then, invites each one of us, in the context of our own concrete lives, first of all to thank God for all the ways in which we do bring life and love, hope and joy into the lives of others. At the same time, we are also invited to acknowledge with honesty and humility that this is not always the way we act towards each other and for that we need to seek forgiveness and healing, first of all from God and then from those we have hurt.

With the coming of Jesus, the deeper truth about God is finally and fully revealed: The one God of Judaism is revealed to be in some mysterious way we can't understand a community of self-giving love. The one God in whom we believe, the one God revealed fully in Jesus, is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, so closely bound together in mutual, enriching love that the three persons of God are one. To be created in the image of God, then, is to be created for love; to be created for communion and community; to be created to give ourselves away to others in love and receive ourselves fully by being loved by others. It is in doing this, or at least living our lives always with this goal and this dream in mind, that we really do give back to God what belongs to God: we give ourselves back to God who gave us to ourselves in giving us the gift of life created in God's own image.

The mystery and the beauty of our Catholic, Christian faith is very deep, very challenging, but very exciting. Today, perhaps, it is enough for us simply to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by God's goodness to us as we consider what God does for us and what God has created us for.



Let us make this Mass today a moment of real thanksgiving to God as we rejoice in all that we are because we are created in God's image, as God's icon.