



70th Anniversary of Our Lady Queen of Apostles Church

Homily

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**Friday 23 April, 2021
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In this evening's first reading King Solomon, who has built a magnificent temple for the Lord, asks a very interesting question. *Will God really live with us on this earth? Why, the heavens and their own heavens, Lord, cannot contain you. How much less this house that I have built.*

King Solomon asks a good question and one which we call might also ask about this church in which we find ourselves this evening. *Does the Lord really live with us on earth? Is this church, this house of prayer, really a dwelling place for God?*

At the end of this evening's first reading, Solomon answers his own question when he makes this plea: *Hear the prayers of your people as they pray in this place. From heaven, where your dwelling is, hear, and as you hear, forgive.*

Tonight, as we ask the same question of this church of Mary Queen of Apostles I think we must give a rather different answer. It is an answer that is found both in the second reading and in the gospel. The Lord dwells in the heavens, of course – but not only there. In the second reading, in writing to the people of Corinth, Paul says quite explicitly, *You are God's building.* And then, as if to underline the point he then, like Solomon, puts a question to his people: *Didn't you realise, he asks, that you were God's Temple, and that the Holy Spirit was living among you?*

Paul's question reminds us tonight, then, as we celebrate both the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the parish and the 50th anniversary of the blessing and dedication of the church, that what we are really celebrating is the fact that, for the last 70 years and here in this church for the last 50 years, the people of God - the real Church, the living Church - has gathered in this place.

And, of course, as tonight's Gospel reminds us, this real Church, this living Church is not something we create for ourselves: it comes to us as a precious gift from God, founded on the rock of Peter and established forever because Christ himself has promised to be with us always.



But what is this living Church really - this church of which we are all a part? The Second Vatican Council, which concluded just a few years before this church building was blessed and opened, spoke of the Church as the sacrament of Christ. While this might sound like a rather dry theological statement it does, in fact, invite us to recognise the true identity of the Church of which you, the people of this parish, really are a living part. Sacraments, as we know, are powerful symbols that have a depth to them which goes far beyond the externals. In baptism, we pour water over a person's head as the minister says "*I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*". The word *baptise* means to plunge into, and that is why originally when people were baptised they were plunged into the pool or the stream from which they would emerge as if newly born again. In baptism then, through the use of water, we are symbolically, and therefore truly, plunged into the mystery of God, and then, immersed in God, we rise to new life in him. In the Eucharist we take bread and wine and the priest or bishop speaks the words of Jesus over that bread and wine - *this is my body; this is my blood*. And so we know, in fact, that when we receive Holy Communion it is not bread and wine we eat and drink but the flesh and blood of the Lord. He unites us to himself in a communion more intimate than any other bond of communion we can ever experience.

The Church itself, according to the teaching of Vatican II, is also a sacrament, a powerful sign of something much deeper. And because we are the Church, not as isolated individuals but as brothers and sisters in a community of faith, it is we together who are, or are meant to be, a sign of something much deeper. And what is it of which we are a sign? It is the ongoing presence of Jesus Christ as the one who continues to offer life, and hope, and compassion, and forgiveness. This is what Saint Paul means when he says that we are the body of Christ – and we in our Catholic tradition have always taken this very seriously.

This is what we are celebrating this evening. We are celebrating the memory of all those faithful people who together, as members of this parish, have kept the presence of Jesus alive in their families, among their friends, and in our community. We are celebrating each other for together we are continuing this vital mission for the good of the world in which we live. And we pray for those who will come after us and who will continue to be this living sacrament of the presence of Jesus among his people.

So tonight I want to invite all of you - all of us - to realise and to rejoice in the fact that we are God's building and that the Holy Spirit lives among us. May God's Spirit continue to enliven us and strengthen us so that through our words, yes, but much more through actions, through the daily reality of our lives, those around us and all those who encounter us might be able to say, "*Look, we have seen the Lord. We are not alone. The Lord is still with us*".