



**Homily for Mass of Investiture –
Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre**

Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

It is something of an understatement, I know, to suggest that we are living through difficult times. This is true of our society generally and true, also, for the Church.

The pandemic which continues to sweep the world, and which always threatens to re-erupt in a serious way here in Australia, confronts the world-wide human community with challenges unlike those most of us have encountered during our lives. We count ourselves very fortunate here in Australia, and particularly perhaps here in Western Australia, because the pandemic has not wreaked the havoc here, or interrupted so dramatically our way of life, as it has done in many other places. We must be grateful to our leaders who have taken often difficult and controversial decisions in an effort to keep us safe. At the same time, we are also conscious that it is our geographical isolation as much as anything else which has enabled us to avoid the worst effects of the pandemic.

We are preoccupied with this health crisis, of course, but we are regularly reminded that there are many other challenges facing our society. The constant eruption of violence in some of our suburbs at night time, the cruel and vicious attacks on the elderly which from time to time are reported by the media, the growing numbers of people without a roof over their head or a job which provides them with enough money to live on, the ever increasing incidence of mental illness, particularly among the young - all these things, and many others which each of us here this morning could name, point to the fact that there is something badly amiss in our society.

The picture is not all bad, of course. There is, for example, a growing consciousness, particularly among many of our young people, of the need to be active in combating these challenging and distressing realities. No matter how wayward and lost our society may at times seem to be, the reality is, at least as our faith teaches us, that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore is capable, with God's grace, of overcoming evil and living life as God intended it to be lived. Christians must be realists but we also must be people of hope, not so much in our selves but in the God who created us, who sustains us and who loves us.



This belief in a creating, life giving and loving God is really what the readings of today's Mass invite us to contemplate. Christians are people of hope because, first and foremost, we are people of faith. I know you understand this very well. The decision to commit yourself, or recommit yourself, in a special way to the Lord and to his Church through your association with the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre is at its heart an act of faith: it is an expression of your awareness of the centrality of God in your lives and of the need to share your faith with others.

Sometimes faith is understood in what we might call a purely intellectual sense. At Mass on Sundays and on other holy days we make a profession of faith and in doing so we announce to ourselves and to each other what it is that we believe. *I believe in God the Father Almighty creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. I believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

What we believe matters because what we believe sets the pattern, or should set the pattern, for our daily lives. What we believe can give us direction and purpose. But faith is more than intellectual assent to certain truths. At the heart of faith is the matter of trust. In the first reading we are reminded of Abraham's faith - Abraham, whom we in fact call our "father in faith". When the letter to the Hebrews speaks of the faith of Abraham, and of his wife Sarah, it does so in terms of their complete trust that God would be faithful to his promises. On the other hand, Jesus, after having calmed the storm which had so terrified his disciples, upbraids them for their lack of faith, which is to say, for their lack of trust in him. We might excuse the disciples, of course, precisely because they were so overcome by fear and could see no way out. But at the same time both Abraham and Sarah, in different ways, had every reason to doubt that they would be the source of countless generations of their descendants and yet, notwithstanding their moments of challenge and uncertainty, nevertheless ultimately put their trust and faith in God and in God's fidelity.

Today we celebrate an act of courage and of trusting faith as new members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre step forward to make their commitment. They do so, I am sure, on the basis of a long journey of faith. It will have been, as it has for all of us, a journey with its ups and downs, a journey with its moments of clarity and its moments of uncertainty, a journey, perhaps, that has been marked at times by less than perfect fidelity. But that they are here, and that we are all here, is a testimony to one of the most fundamental truths of our faith, found in the Second Letter to Timothy: *We may be unfaithful but God is always faithful for God cannot disown his own self* (2 Tim 2:3).

May the witness of those who today commit themselves anew to God through this act of dedication renew in all of us our awareness of God's love and God's fidelity, and strengthen us we continue to strive to be faithful to him.