



UNDA Graduation Mass 2021

Homily

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

**Monday 12 July 2021
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In the light of today's gospel, perhaps I should begin my reflections by saying, *"How happy are those who graduating, for a new beginning stretches out before you and the world awaits your contribution to our society"*. Today is a day of celebration for you, for your families and friends, and for all those who, as part of the University of Notre Dame Australia, especially here in WA, have walked beside you on the long and sometimes difficult journey of your studies. It is, too, a day of thanksgiving as you remember all those who have been a part of your journey so far and have helped you to arrive at this important moment.

We have many universities here in WA but only one invites its graduands to come together to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving. The fact that this is a central and essential part of your graduation experience points to that which makes Notre Dame unique among the universities in our state: Notre Dame is an institution of higher learning where what we might call the "God question" is not excluded or marginalised or derided. Rather the God question is recognised and embraced as something without which a university education will be fundamentally lop-sided and less than truly comprehensive. It is not the mission of Notre Dame University to bully or coerce people into adopting any particular religious faith – but it is the mission of Notre Dame to propose, faithfully and unfailingly, a vision of life which is grounded in belief in God as the creator, in Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation to humanity, and in the Church as the living and effective sign and bearer of God's ongoing engagement with humanity, with us.

The inspiration for the establishment of Notre Dame thirty years ago, and the ongoing commitment to Notre Dame's founding principles across those decades, find their centre, therefore, in Jesus Christ who, in the Catholic understanding of Christianity, both fully makes God known to us - because he is God among us as one of us – and fully reveals us to ourselves. This is because Jesus lived the reality of his human life with absolute and unwavering integrity and fidelity to God's intention in creating humankind in the divine image and likeness. If we want to know what being fully and faithfully human really looks like, we have only to look to Jesus, and especially to the mind and heart of Jesus which are revealed in both what he said and what he did.



For people who are celebrating the successful completion of their studies and are about to step, in one way or another, into a new chapter in the story of their lives, as you are all about to do, it is a precious gift to know the mind and heart of Jesus. He is a sure guide for the living of our lives to the full.

The challenge, of course, which is also the adventure which beckons to you, is to grapple with the reality that what the words and deeds of Jesus, the mind and heart of Jesus, put before us is in so many respects the very opposite of what our instincts, shaped by the world around us, might be leading us to embrace.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this more obvious than in the words of today's gospel reading. In Saint Matthew's gospel they are presented as the opening words in a long and complex sermon which takes up three of Matthew's twenty-eight chapters. Sometimes this long sermon is called the "Sermon on the Mount" because Jesus is presented as preaching it from the top of a mountain. The opening of this sermon, to which we have listened today, is often referred to as the "beatitudes" because the current translation, which uses the phrase "happy are those" is a more recent translation of a previous, better-known translation, which uses the phrase "blessed are those".

We will only really understand the meaning of today's gospel passage, and the radical and unsettling nature of what Jesus is proposing, if we see today's gospel as an introduction to the whole Sermon on the Mount. It is a sermon which is best read in one sitting – but I am sure you don't want me to do that now! Perhaps it might help, though, to recall, for example, that immediately following today's gospel Jesus talks about his disciples as the salt of the earth and light of the world. What he means is that his disciples will be enabled to offer the world clarity and vision, and the wherewithal to preserve all that is good and valuable, which is what salt was used for prior to modern refrigeration. But this will only come about if the disciples of Jesus have embraced the values set out in the beatitudes.

And what are those values? Poverty of spirit, which is that profound realisation that our security is not to be found in possessions or the hoarding of resources or the relentless climbing of the ladder of ambition, but in an openness to God as the one in whom we place our trust. Gentleness and meekness, which lead us to treat others with sensitivity and which enable us to step back from aggressively demanding our own rights and privileges, often at the expense of others. An ability to mourn, not just for the loss of loved ones or the dashing of our hopes, but for the inhumanity which we show towards each other, and the complacency with which we accept structures or decisions which perpetuate the poverty, loneliness and abandonment of so many people. A desire for what is right, for what is just, for what is fair, which we experience as a kind of urgent hunger and thirst which drives us to act. A merciful heart, born of a compassion which does not seek to judge or to exact revenge but rather looks beyond the surface to the brokenness and neediness which lies at the heart of so much of the anger, pain and suffering which afflicts others or is inflicted by them, and by us as well. A purity of heart, a singleness of purpose, which



is focused on the dignity of each human person because we see in them not someone of whom we can take advantage, but rather another child of God, our brother or sister, equally loved and cherished by God as we are. A peacemaker who tries never to bring disharmony or disunity into the lives of others, and who is determined to work for the restoration of harmony, of unity and of peace whenever it has been damaged. A person of courage, who is ready to bear the burden of misunderstanding, of criticism, of “being cancelled” as today’s expression would put it, rather than be untrue to his or her principles.

To live this way, according to Jesus, is to be happy, is to be blessed by God, is to live as God intends us to live. To all of you who are graduating, and indeed to the rest of us as well, Jesus offers a recipe for a life fully lived. Jesus does not promise material wealth or a stellar career or a life free from challenge and difficulty. He promises instead a life of deep peace and profound inner harmony which will make us precious gifts to those we love, and valued companions on the road to those with whom we share our lives. We really will be, then, the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

This is the challenge which comes to you as you conclude your time as members of the Notre Dame community. May the Lord give you the courage you need to rise to this challenge. Then you will be called children of God. You will become inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.