



## **CEWA Commissioning Mass 2021**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 19 November, 2021  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Those of you who followed the unfolding of the first Formal Assembly of the Plenary Council will know that one of the major themes which emerged through that week was that of leadership and governance. This is not surprising given that in the three or so preceding years of preparation for the Plenary Council this question emerged as a very significant one. It was, of course, a theme which was picked up in the document *Light from the Southern Cross*. This was an in-depth review of the leadership and governance of the Church in Australia and followed on from the dreadful revelations of abuse which emerged during the Royal Commission and which led the commission to formally recommend that the Church examine its governance structures. This recommendation was made with a view towards fostering a culture of openness, transparency and accountability.

I will leave it to those who are interested to read *Light from the Southern Cross* and I would encourage all of you to continue to follow the work of the Plenary Council in this regard. That there were serious failures in leadership and governance, with dreadful consequences for so many people, cannot be denied: that we should examine and review our structures, making use of the wisdom of our wider society in doing so, also seems obvious to me.

But what is also clear is that we must do all this in the light of the Gospel - which is to say, in the light of the teaching and example of Jesus. This was not part of the Royal Commission's recommendation, but it must be a part of our response to the Royal Commission. Ultimately, we must not and do not base ourselves on the wisdom of the secular society in which we live, although we must certainly learn from all that is good in our society. Ultimately, we must base ourselves not on secular values but on the values and culture of the gospel.

Saint Paul expresses this very well when he gives this instruction to one of his early communities:

Adapt yourselves no longer to the patterns of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern what is good, what is perfect, what is according to the mind of God (Rom 12:2).'

This evening we have gathered here in the Cathedral, in this year of the bicentenary of Catholic Education in Australia, to commission our system leaders, to welcome our new leaders, to affirm



those leaders who are moving from one position to another, and to acknowledge those who are retiring. Here we are speaking of people who have been and are both leaders in our society, for our society is deeply invested in the matter of the education of our children and young people, and also leaders in the Lord's Church, for every Catholic school is a unique community of Catholic faith and discipleship.

Questions of leadership and governance, then, and the question of how a faith community is to live the values of the gospel within a society which is no longer explicitly grounded in many of those values, are questions important to every one of us gathered here this evening.

Any Christian faith community, including an educational faith community, if it is to be a living expression of a gospel culture, must ultimately find its sense of purpose and identity in Jesus Christ. Our Catholic faith assures us that in the person of Jesus, in his words, his actions and his teaching, the mystery of God is fully and finally revealed. Catholic faith also assures us that the truth about God which, of course, also encompasses the truth about who we are as people called into life by God, is at the heart of the Church's teaching, life and prayer. The Lord who lived and died, who rose again and ascended to his Father in heaven, is the same Lord who sent his Holy Spirit upon the apostles gathered around Mary in prayer, thus giving birth to the Church of which we are members. The Church exists, by God's divine will, to speak of Christ through word and action in such a powerful and grace-filled way that Christ continues to be present to the world in and through the Church. This profound truth both reveals the exalted mission and identity of the Church and at the same time shines a blinding light on the dark places of the Church's failures to be what God desires us to be.

The leadership and governance of any Catholic community of faith, including a Catholic school, can and should be evaluated and assessed on this basis. And so, we must ask: is my school community, or the team I lead at CEWA, a community which speaks of and which gives witness to Jesus Christ, both in what we do and in what we say?

Here we can turn to tonight's gospel passage which comes from Saint Matthew's Gospel. This gospel has been described as presenting Jesus to us as the lifter of burdens. This is, perhaps, not a bad description of the role of education and, therefore, of educators. We are those who have the privilege of lifting burdens from the shoulders of our young people: certainly the burden of ignorance and the burden of uncertainty, but often also the burden of loneliness, the burden of rejection, the burden of misunderstanding and the burden of confusion. At the same time, it is also true that if we do not exercise our responsibilities and our influence with integrity we may do the very opposite and leave our young people radically unprepared to deal with the difficulties and challenges which will inevitably be theirs as they journey through life.

Our young people need us to be trustworthy, to be people of integrity. Jesus cries out in tonight's gospel, "Come to me, all you who labour and overburdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me for I am gentle and humble heart and you will find rest for your souls. For



my yoke is easy, my burden is light". By becoming educators, and especially as leaders, we too are crying out to our young people and, in many ways, through them to their families, saying "Come to me, lean on me, learn from me, for you can trust me and I can be a sure guide for you".

We know that so many of our children and young people, and sometimes their parents too, do listen to us, do trust us, and indeed do often come to us seeking guidance as to the best way forward. Will we, like some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day, be the blind guides, the fools and the hypocrites, as Jesus called them, who betray our children and young people by leading them astray, or will we, like Jesus himself, be a sure guide and a safe refuge, lifting burdens from their shoulders and setting them out on the way which leads to life: the way of Jesus, the way of the gospel, the way which will bring them safely to the fullness of life which Jesus promises to those who follow him? For unless we believe that the way of Jesus is the way our schools must proclaim, then we should shut our schools down.

Tonight, as Bishop Holohan, Bishop Sproston and I, united with Bishop Morrissey in his forced absence, commission you, this is what we are commissioning you to be: leaders who foster and develop your communities by shaping them into a living expression of a true gospel culture where the light and easy yoke of Jesus, the yoke of generous self-giving for the good of others, is gently laid upon the shoulders of all those in your care.