



## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 31 October, 2021  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Today's second reading invites us to reflect on something which is very important for us as Christians once we realise that at its heart to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus.

The second reading is about priests, and for us as Catholics this probably leads most of us to reflect on the priesthood as we have experienced it in the Church. We think of priests we have known, of priests who have worked in the parishes to which we have belonged, of the priests who perhaps baptised our children, who celebrated marriages or helped us when one of our loved ones died. Perhaps we think of the special and demanding role which priests play in the life of the Church, of their generosity in embracing a life of celibate chastity, of their willingness to make the service of God and of God's people the organising centre of everything. Or perhaps, sadly, we think of the way in which some priests have betrayed the Church and have brought great suffering to some and shame to others.

It is good to reflect on all these things but it is important to remember that when we think of priesthood in the Church our thoughts should not go firstly to those men who are ordained as priests but rather to Jesus, who calls them to the priesthood. Today's second reading is not really about priests as we understand them in our Catholic tradition. Today's second reading is about Jesus as the one and only true priest who, through his life, death and resurrection, has brought the old institution of priesthood to a close and initiated something new.

Traditionally priesthood has always been about offering something to God in sacrifice so as to acknowledge our dependence on God for life and for the healing and forgiveness of those things which separate us from God. In the Jewish tradition, as Jesus experienced it himself during his own life as a faithful Jew, various things - fruits of the earth - were offered to God in sacrifice, not because God needed them but because human beings had, and have, a need to do something concrete to demonstrate their desire to be at one with God in peace, in obedience and in love.

Jesus transforms all this by offering not **something** but someone: Jesus offers himself. In doing this Jesus brings to an end the need to offer anything else to God and therefore brings to an end, indeed brings to perfection, the role of the priest. He becomes, through his gift of himself throughout his life



and through his death, the one perfect priest - and he remains the one perfect priest. We have no need of any others.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus and his Father send to the disciples after the Lord's Ascension into heaven, the new community of faith - the community of the disciples of Jesus - is formed into a people. And we of course, through our baptism, are a part of this new people. But because we are a people who have been brought together by Christ and particularly, then, because we are sharers in the body and blood of Christ through the Eucharist, we are so closely united to the Lord Jesus that we become one with him: because he is the one true priest we, his people, have become a priestly people. This is why in the Scriptures the Letter of Saint Peter describes the Church as *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart for God* (1 Peter 2:9).

And so we are not a priestly people **apart** from Jesus: we are a priestly people only because we are united with him. It is his one, unique priesthood that he shares with us.

Because the essence of the priesthood of Jesus lies in his total offering of himself to God for the sake of God's people so as a priestly people in him, this is the very heart of our vocation as disciples: to offer ourselves freely and totally to God for the sake of God's people - and those people might, in the concrete reality of our lives, mean my wife or my husband, my children or my parents, the lonely person who lives down the road, the migrant family which has moved into the neighbourhood, or indeed anyone who in any way might have their life enriched because I, as a disciple of Jesus, have put myself at their service. When we sacrifice ourselves in any way for others we are living out our priestly vocation in imitation of the Lord.

All of this falls into place every time we come to celebrate the Eucharist together. Gathered around the altar we enter once more into the great mystery of the Lord's love for us. He takes bread and breaks it and gives it to his disciples saying: *Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is my body which is given up for you*. He takes the cup of wine and gives it to his disciples saying: *Take this and drink from it, for this is the cup of my blood, the blood which will be poured out for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven*. And then, most tellingly, he says to his disciples, as he says to us this morning: *Do this in memory of me*. He calls us to **celebrate** the Eucharist, as we are now doing here in the cathedral today, in order to **become** the Eucharist. We celebrate Christ's sacrifice of himself for us so that we, too, can sacrifice ourselves for others.

In the great mystery of his love the Lord chooses some men from within the community of disciples and through a special gift of grace, empowers them to act in his person and in his name so that through their ministry, and through the unique nature of their total gift of self to the Lord and his Church, they might become the enablers of our ongoing fidelity to our vocation as God's priestly people. The Lord knows that it is impossible for us to live the life of discipleship to which we are called if we are relying only on ourselves. It is only through the free gift of God's grace made concrete and available through the life and ministry of our priests, and especially through their sacramental ministry, that we can be strengthened to live in fidelity to the Lord's call.



Please pray for our priests. At this time in particular their life is not an easy one. They need our support, our understanding, our willingness to forgive when they are not all that we want them to be, and our gratitude. They are God's precious gift to his Church. Through our care for them we can set them free to live their vocation with generosity and joy.