



Chrism Mass

Homily

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

**Tuesday 12 April, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In this evening's second reading from the Book of the Apocalypse we are told that, because Jesus loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, we are a line of kings, priests to serve his God and father.

These words are spoken to every member of the Church which of course, includes those of us who have been called to the ordained ministry. We are priestly people, all of us, by virtue of our baptism, made so in order to serve our God and Father.

The First Letter of Saint Peter reinforces this: we are "*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that we might declare the riches of him, who called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light*".

The Book of the Apocalypse and the Letter of Saint Peter are both looking back to some words which God commanded Moses to speak to the chosen people: *if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant you will be my treasured possession out of all the nations, for to me you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*.

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant – this was God's promise to the Chosen People. That promise has now been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We **are** a Chosen Race - we are a Royal Priesthood - we are a People set apart to sing the praises of God – because we **are** one in Christ.

As I reflect on these Scriptural passages some questions come to me which perhaps also come to you. What does it mean to be a kingdom of priests? How is the promise of God, made through Moses, fulfilled in Jesus? And if, indeed, we are together a kingdom of priests why, then, do we also have ordained priests? Why, tonight, do we single out our priests, celebrate them, and ask them to renew the commitments they made at the time of their ordination?

These are important questions for us as at any time but especially now as we move towards the Final Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia. The role and identity of the ordained priest within the Church is a central question being considered by the Council. It is also something which is at the heart of the process of renewal taking place in the Archdiocese as we try to reposition ourselves according to the vision of Pope Francis who calls us to adopt a missionary stance in everything we do.



It is important to remember that only in the letter to the Hebrews is Jesus referred to explicitly as a priest, and always in the context of sacrifice. Jesus is compared to the high priests of the Jewish tradition. They offered animals and the fruits of the earth in sacrifice as a symbol of their desire to return to the Lord. Jesus, instead, offered himself on our behalf in an act of total surrender and obedience to his Father, in order to re-establish the right relationship between God and humanity.

This is where the deepest meaning of the priesthood of Jesus lies – in his sacrifice of himself - and it is where the deepest meaning of our priesthood as members of the Priestly People of God also lies. We are all priests because through our baptism we have been joined to Christ, the one true priest. We are priests because we are called to have in us, as Saint Paul puts it, *the same mind that was in Christ Jesus* - and his mind was that he should humble himself and become obedient to his Father, even to the point of death - death on the cross - for us. But it is also important to remember that Jesus did not offer himself only on the last day of his life: he offered himself on every day of his life. He was always a priest – he did not become one through his agonising death on the cross.

The essence, then, of the priesthood of Jesus is found in his humility, in his obedience, and in his readiness to give everything, including his life, for others. The essence of the priesthood of God's priestly people is found in exactly the same realities - our humility before God, our obedience to the will of God for us as individuals and together, and our readiness to put ourselves at the service of others, no matter the cost. This is a daunting and demanding challenge, but it is also an ennobling one.

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The story of every single one of us is marked both by light and by shadow, by beauty and by ugliness, by success and by failure. As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans, *"I often do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate"*. Our intentions are often good but we are constantly undermined by our own weakness and selfishness. And so, the prayer of the tax collector, which Jesus praised so strongly - *Lord have mercy on me a sinner* - is one which we will often find rising in our hearts.

This reality of our sinfulness and infidelity can help us understand why, in this priestly Church of God, we have need of the ministry of those ordained to be at our service as priests and bishops. They are the ones who, through the grace and power of God, are commissioned to keep before our eyes in a visible, powerful and effective way, the ongoing presence of Jesus among us as our healer, our shepherd, our teacher, and our servant leader. Because Jesus is still among us in this very real and concrete way through our priests and bishops, our priestly identity and mission can be renewed, restored and strengthened. The Lord has given us the ordained ministry of priests and bishops, with the deacons to assist them, in order to constantly renew and re-invigorate us, especially through the sacraments, so that we can, indeed, sing the praises of God who has called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light.

Tonight, as your priests renew the commitments they made at the time of their ordination, please pray for them - pray for us - for we need you to help us be the priests God has called us to be. Remind us that we are called to live, in imitation of Christ, in humility, in obedience, and in generous self-sacrifice



for your sake. Remind us that we are called to be living images of the one who is the face of the Father's mercy. But remember, too, that we, like you, are in need of compassion, of forgiveness, of understanding and of patience.

We are all brothers and sisters in the faith, all loved and cherished by God, all graced with many gifts and all in need of God's compassion and love. If we are to be, together, the Church that God is calling us to be, then we must work hard to strengthen the communion, the mutual respect and support, which should exist between all of us. This is what Saint Paul reminds us: let us give the last word to him – it is a word for every single one of us.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Just as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive. Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which, indeed, you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the words of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God; and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12-17).