



## **Seventh Sunday of the Year (Year C)**

### **Homily**

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

**Sunday 20 February 2022  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Some years ago, well before I became a bishop, I was the rector of the formation house of the Salesians, the religious order to which I belong. My responsibility, which I shared with other Salesians, was to do our best to help young Salesians still in training to grow into mature, faith-filled, generous men who would be able to give their lives, fully and without reservation, to the Lord and his Church through their life and ministry in the Salesian Congregation.

It was a privilege, a heavy responsibility, and at times a frustrating role to have. Guiding young people along the path to maturity is not easy, as any of you who are parents would probably know. Even with the best will in the world, and generally speaking young men who were trying to become good Salesians certainly did have very good and idealistic intentions, there were inevitable disagreements and challenges and moments of tension. Every one of us is a less than perfect human being, and as we grow to adulthood we encounter various things, and undergo various experiences, which can sometimes throw us off balance and lead us astray. This occasionally happened with some of the young men with whom I lived and whom I was trying to help.

On one occasion, in sharing some of my struggles and difficulties with my spiritual director, he asked me a question which I am a little ashamed to admit surprised me at the time. I had been talking about a particular person with whom I was having some difficulties and my spiritual director said to me, "Do you pray for him?" As I tried to come up with an answer to that question, I realised that I had been so focused on the difficulties I was having with this young man that I had failed to think about and pray about the reasons why he was proving to be such a challenge to me. Over time, as I realised how important it was to pray not just in general terms but in quite a specific way for any person with whom I was having difficulties, I came to understand that in praying for people like this the Lord, as well as possibly changing that person, was certainly changing me. Through sincere prayer for the person with whom I was struggling I began to understand that the struggles and difficulties of that person, and things about that person which perhaps particularly upset me or even angered me, were more than likely the result of disappointments, or betrayals, or other negative and destructive experiences in their lives, which were playing themselves out in patterns of behaviour which I was struggling to cope with. What was happening, I think, was that through praying sincerely, honestly and humbly for the people who were a problem for me in my life, I began to see things more through the eyes of the Lord than through my own selfish concerns.



The Lord, in other words, was teaching me compassion and this, of course, is precisely what the Lord is calling us to in today's gospel. *"Be compassionate", Jesus says, "as your Heavenly Father is compassionate. Do not judge, do not condemn, grant pardon, give in full measure"*.

Sometimes these might seem like impossible things for us to achieve. So often we are very quick to judge others and indeed, more often than not, to presume the worst about other people's motives when they make choices with which we might disagree. And, of course, with quick judgements frequently comes swift condemnation, which so often presumes that there is malice involved rather than some misunderstanding or a lack of knowledge, or the absence of people in their lives who might have been able to teach them a better way. This presumption of malice, in its turn, makes pardon and forgiveness so hard to offer to those who have hurt us: our hearts become hardened towards them and there is then little room in our hearts for the generosity which might reach out to them and hold out the promise of a new beginning.

When we hear Jesus inviting us to be people of compassion, of forgiveness, of generosity, and of large heartedness, we are really being given an insight into what we might call the mind of Jesus. This is who Jesus was, this is how he encountered people, and this is the pattern, the way of life, to which he is calling us. Saint Paul once said to the Christians in the town of Philippi that they should have in them the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. It was Saint Paul who also said to the Christians in Corinth, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ". After his conversion, Saint Paul took very seriously the words of Jesus who proclaimed himself to be the Way that we should follow, the Truth to which we should commit ourselves, and the Life which should be the source of our life each day. In calling us to be compassionate, Jesus is really calling us to allow him to be the centre, the inspiration and, we might say, the heart and soul of our lives. This is what it means to be a disciple, to be a Christian. And this is why the Lord has called us into his Church in order to find within the community of faith the support and encouragement we need to keep trying to follow him. And, of course, it is why the Lord has given us, as the very centre and heart of his Church, the gift of the Eucharist, so that by receiving him into our lives and into our hearts he may, from within, gradually transform us into living images of himself, so that when people encounter us they are encountering him.

Perhaps, today, as we receive the Lord in the gift of the Eucharist, we might ask him to continue his work of healing and purification within us so that we can be compassionate as our Heavenly Father is compassionate, so that we can be living images of Christ present and at work in our world.