



## **Centenary of the Knights of the Southern Cross WA**

### **Homily**

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

**Saturday 12 February 2022  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

One hundred years ago, when the Knights of the Southern Cross were established in Australia, the social and religious context in which the Catholic Church found itself was very different to that of today.

Very little time had passed since the end of the First World War, the so called 'war to end all wars', and very few people could have predicted that within less than twenty years the world would be plunged into an even more destructive and wide-spread conflict.

In this period between the two world wars Australia, like much of the world, was in the grip of the depression which caused so much social disruption and economic hardship to so many people. This disruption was, of course, even more difficult for Catholics, due to the strong anti-Catholic sentiment which was so widespread in Australia at that time. We are all aware, for example, of the fact that so many job advertisements at that time included the phrase 'Catholics need not apply'.

It was in the context of this challenging social and religious environment that the Knights of the Southern Cross was formed to provide support, encouragement and fraternity for Catholics and to stand up for the rights and teachings of the Church.

Although in many ways it was a bleak time for Catholics it was nonetheless a time when Catholics and other Christians, who together formed the vast majority of the Australian population, at least shared the same fundamental moral values.

Today things are very different. We are now not only a much more religiously diverse nation but, as the census statistics show, the number of people identifying as having no religion at all is increasing rapidly. To find ourselves in the midst of a society which is rapidly shifting from a faith-based society to a society which is avowedly secular and does not base itself consciously on religious beliefs presents all of us as Christians, and all of you who are connected to the Knights of the Southern Cross, with a challenge none of us could have anticipated 100 years ago, or perhaps even as little as 20 years ago.

How are we as members of the Catholic Church, and how are you as members of an organisation which has a long and proud history of commitment and fidelity to the Catholic Church, meant to respond to this daunting challenge?

This is the very question which the fifth Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia is presently seeking to discern. As many of you would know, the Plenary Council is engaged in the



vital and difficult task of asking not what we want for the Church but what we have come to understand God wants for the Church in Australia. This is proving to be a difficult and complex task. It is easy for all of us to identify what we don't like about Church but it would be a fatal mistake for us to presume that this necessarily corresponds to God's will for the Church. Such a conviction could only come from sincere prayer, reflection, discussion and perhaps, most of all, listening – to the wisdom of the Church, to each other, and ultimately to God.

This kind of approach is essential for any of us, as individual Christians and as communities of faith, which is what you are, if we are to move forward into the future in deep and constant fidelity to what God is asking of us. This fidelity will be grounded in a deep understanding of and commitment to God's self-revelation in Jesus, as he is presented to us primarily in the Gospels and then in the teaching and tradition of the Church, which is God's chosen instrument for bringing about his kingdom in every time and place.

An important element in fidelity to the Jesus of the gospels emerges from today's gospel reading where we read that Jesus, when confronted by the needs of the people who have come to encounter him, immediately decides to meet those needs. In seeking to understand what this gospel passage is calling us to do and be, it is important to see just how Jesus meets those needs. He asks his apostles to gather together what they can from the people whom they are seeking to help. The apostles do so and bring to the Lord all that they have been able to gather together. They present it to the Lord, meagre and insufficient though it is to meet the needs of the people, and Jesus, receiving it from the disciples, works the miracle of multiplication. He then very deliberately gives the food back to the disciples to distribute to the people. In this case of course the disciples represent the Church. Just as Jesus relied on that small community of twelve men to bring his gifts to those in need, so the Lord relies on us all of us as members of the Church to give what we have to the Lord, to allow him to give it back to us blessed and transformed, and then to share it with God's people. And, more than anything else, what we have and what we give to the Lord is the gift of our faith and our fidelity, imperfect and fragile though this might be. He will receive what we offer, work the miracle of transformation in us, and then send us out among his people, strengthened in faith and fidelity, to share the gift of faith with others.

This is, of course the vocation of every Christian, and has always been very explicitly the vocation of the Knights of the Southern Cross. It is still the vocation of the Knights today. Through your active involvement in the life of the Church come to the Lord in simplicity, in faith and in hope, give yourselves to him, allow him to strengthen you, and then go out into the world to share what you have been given, knowing that he goes with you.

For the last 100 years the Knights of the Southern Cross have been known for their commitment to the faith and for their fidelity to the Lord and to his Church. At a time of great challenge and trial for the Church which we all love and to which we are so privileged to belong, it is my earnest prayer and plea that you all renew your determination to continue along the path of faith and service as the Kings continue to be signs and bearers of the Lord's love for his people.