



**Greenwood Parish – New Parish Centre Blessing & Opening  
Friday Week 6 of Ordinary Time – Year C**

**Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Friday 18 February, 2022  
All Saints Catholic Church, Greenwood**

As I was reflecting on the readings which the Church's liturgy provides for us today, one thing in particular from the first reading jumped out at me.

The first reading is from the letter of Saint James. It is a very practical letter setting out in concrete terms what being a disciple of Jesus really involves. It is, therefore, very relevant for each of us as individual Christians and very relevant for you as a particular community of Christian disciples here in this parish.

The letter very obviously addresses a practical question. It is one which troubled the very earliest Christian communities and still troubles the Church today. What is the relationship between faith and action or, as the letter itself puts it, between faith and good works?

Saint Paul in some of his letters also dealt with this fundamental question. Saint Paul wanted to stress that we are not saved because of what we do but rather because of what we believe or, even more accurately, in whom we believe. Sometimes Saint Paul would say that we are saved by faith and at other times that we are saved by grace. Behind both of these ideas is the conviction that salvation, that is forgiveness of our sins and eventually entry into eternal life, is a free gift from God which we cannot deserve no matter how many good actions we perform. This is a mistake which Christians often make, and when they do it turns religion into a set of rules and regulations to follow rather than a way of life to embrace with joy. Saint Paul insists that forgiveness of sin and our eternal salvation is not a reward for good behaviour but rather is a precious gift, freely given to us because of God's great love and mercy and not because God feels he owes it to us because we have behaved ourselves.

Saint James would agree with St Paul, but St James was facing a particular challenge in the community to which he was writing. Some scholars believe, and I think they may well be right, that the letter of St James arises from a situation in which some Christians believed that because salvation was a free gift from God which we could not earn or deserve, it therefore did not matter what we did because no matter what we did God would still save us. In extreme cases, in some early Christian communities, this led to all sorts of immoral behaviour. This obviously is not what Saint Paul meant, but it was what some people had come to believe. In today's first reading,



therefore, we find Saint James saying “*faith becomes perfect by what we do*” and that “*if good works do not go with faith then faith is quite dead*”.

It is important, I think, to realise that St James is not saying that we earn our salvation by doing good works. Salvation always is and always will be a wonderful, generous, merciful, and undeserved gift from God to us. This is why praise of God and gratitude to God are such important parts of our lives as Christians. What St

James is saying is that our salvation depends on our faith, the existence of which and the nature of which will inevitably show forth in the way we behave: in the way

we behave towards God himself, in the way we behave towards each other, and in the way we behave towards the world in which we live.

But then, I think, the question presents itself: *what is faith?* Is it what we believe, or is it, rather, who we believe in? It is, in fact, both but one is really the foundation of the other. As Christians, before we believe in any particular teaching or doctrine of the Church we are being called and invited to believe in God as he has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ who lives in the Church. And to speak about belief in God is to speak about so much more than belief in the existence of God. It is to speak of a belief and a hope that God really is who Jesus reveals God to be. It is, in other words, to believe in God as the one who is the source of my life, and the centre of my life, and the ultimate destination to which my life is leading. It is to believe that in Jesus we encounter the face of God; that in his voice and in his words we hear the voice of God; that in his life, his actions, his example, we see lived out in concrete form what it means to live fully, with integrity and with openness to God. And ultimately it is to realise, or at least begin to realise, that God is calling to us, inviting us to open our lives and our minds and our hearts to a relationship of love with him, in and with and through Jesus. We could sum it all up by saying that the word *faith* is perhaps interchangeable with the word *trust* or that, perhaps, the two words go together. For Christians to say that we believe in God is to say that we trust God, to speak of Christian faith is to speak of trusting faith in Christ. And it is because all of this is true that we can realise what Saint James is trying to tell us in his letter. We are indeed not saved by the good works we perform but rather by the quality of the trust we place in God as the heart of our lives. It is this trust which inevitably gives birth to a deeper and deeper love which then spurs us on to share this wonderful gift of love with others and to do so in all the practical ways which are available to us.

In many ways we could say that the mission of any parish community is really summed up here: that the whole community, under the guidance of its Parish Priest who the shepherd-leader of the community, is called to be a community of trusting, faithful disciples, who help each other to grow in our love for the Lord, to grow more deeply aware of God’s great mercy and compassion, and who then, together, become a vital, active, generous and out reaching community whose trusting faith in God is there for everybody to see in the way you care for each other, forgive each other,



support and encourage each other, and reach out in every way you can, especially into your local community, to help and support all those in need.

Let's give the last word to St James: *if one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on one of you says to them "I wish you well, keep yourself warm and eat plenty" without giving them these bare necessities of life then what good is that? Faith is like that. If good works do not go with it it is quite dead.*