



## **Mass of Commissioning for Catholic Education WA 2022**

### **Homily**

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

**Thursday 27 January 2022  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In this first part of the year the Church, in its daily Eucharistic liturgy, offers us a continuous reading from the Gospel of Mark. According to the scholars this gospel is almost certainly the earliest of the four to be written and probably reflects more of the primitive tradition concerning Jesus. In one sense, of course, this may mean that it brings us closer to the historical Jesus, but in another sense it also represents a less developed theological understanding than that which we will find in the other three gospels, which are the result of a longer period of reflection upon the extraordinary events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the case of all four gospels, of course, and indeed for the whole New Testament, it is the firm belief of the Church that the scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit dictated the contents of the gospels word by word to the writers. Rather it means that, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, *God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted* (Dei Verbum 11). The Council goes on to say that *“since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through people in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words”* (Dei Verbum 12). In simple terms this means that we can trust the gospels, and the other New Testament writings, to reveal Jesus to us as long as we read them within the believing community of his faithful disciples, that is the Church.

We are fortunate here in Australia to have two world-renowned Catholic scripture scholars who can help us understand what the sacred writers of the gospels really intended. Father Frank Moloney, a Salesian priest, has proposed that the central theme of Saint Mark's gospel is fidelity: the gospel, says Father Moloney, is centred on Jesus as the one who never fails his constantly failing disciples. Father Brendan Byrne, a Jesuit priest, suggests that Mark's gospel presents Jesus as the one who comes to set us free - and that this “setting free” does not come without cost. Father Brendan entitles his study of Saint Mark's gospel “A Costly Freedom”. As the gospel unfolds, says Father Brendan, we become more aware of the cost of fidelity: the cost to Jesus, the cost to his heavenly Father, and the cost to all those who would seek to be his disciples.



As we begin a new year in the vital work of Catholic education it seems to me that these two themes, fidelity and freedom, which are, of course, complementary rather than contradictory, are worth reflecting on.

Catholic schools exist in order, in collaboration with their parents, and families, to prepare our children and young people for the great adventure of life. As you all know well, the very existence of our schools is premised on a deep and abiding belief that life is a gift from God and that every single person is called to recognise and acknowledge the giver, receive the gift with gratitude, and use the gift, joyfully and creatively, in fidelity to the intention of the giver.

What this means, it seems to me, is that a Catholic education has as one of its central aims the fostering of attitudes of mind, heart and spirit, which can set each person free to live his or her life fully and faithfully, with integrity and enthusiasm. How many lives are constrained or blighted by fear, by confusion, by lack of opportunity and, I would add unapologetically, by ignorance of the existence of God, of God's amazing and unfathomable love, and of God's revelation of himself in Jesus of Nazareth? It is our privilege and our great responsibility, as partners in the work of Catholic education, to play our part in sharing all this with our young people. Today I ask you all to recognise the depth and beauty of this privilege and responsibility and to commit yourselves to responding to this challenge in every way you can. By calling you to take part in the mission of Catholic Education, and it is that call which has brought you to the Cathedral today, God seeks to light a brightly burning lamp in the lives of your young people. Please don't hide that lamp under a basket or stow it away where no-one can see it – for you, in fact, are the lights which God seeks to use to enkindle in our young people a flame of hope in the future.

A vocation such as this is daunting and difficult, but surely energising as well for those who have the courage to embrace it. It will, to use the phrase from Fr Brendan, be at times a costly burden. It is inevitable that each one of us will tread the path already travelled by the first disciples of Jesus - a path that is marked by both enthusiasm and by the distressing possibility, sometimes realised, of failure, of "falling short". There will be moments this year when the pressures of the positions you hold will perhaps get the better of you. You may lose your patience with the young people, you may become very judgmental about some of the parents and families, you may become resentful of those who make constant demands on you, you may become very critical of some of your colleagues. It may even be that you hold all this in, only to take it out on your husband or wife, your own children or your friends when you get home at the end of a tough day. At such times the central theme identified by Fr Moloney in his study of Mark's gospel might be a source of hope for you. We may fail in all sorts of ways but as long as we allow the Lord to pick us up and set us on our feet again, we will be OK. Jesus does not walk away from us, even when we sometimes walk away from him or turn our backs on him. But if we only remember to look over our shoulder we will find that he has always been close, ready to understand, to forgive, to encourage and to strengthen.



The first disciples of Jesus constantly misunderstood Jesus, constantly failed him, sometimes even betrayed him but, with the exception of Judas, somehow managed to keep the flame of faith alive in their hearts even if at times that flame was weak and unsteady. It was the fidelity of Jesus, in the face of the infidelity of his disciples, which ultimately prevented them from falling away completely. It was that same fidelity which, in the end, inspired and nourished within them the courage they needed to rise to the challenge of discipleship even to the point of giving their lives for him. His fidelity created within them the freedom, the costly but ultimately energising freedom, to be all that he had called them to be – and, of course, not for their own sake but for the sake of all those to whom the Lord would send them.

The Lord is sending you to care for his children and young people. He is commissioning you to work with their families and with the community of the Church to prepare his children and young people for the great adventure of their lives. He is relying on you to be signs and the bearers of his love for them. As we celebrate this Mass today I invite you all, costly though it may sometimes prove to be, to say “yes” to the Lord’s call and to renew that “yes” each day as the coming year unfolds.