



**Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year C)  
10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Blessing and Opening of Columbarium and Rosary Garden**

**Homily**

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

**Sunday 27 March 2022  
St Helena's Catholic Church, Ellenbrook Parish**

We've just listened to one of the most beautiful and extraordinary parables that Jesus ever told.

And I wanted to reflect with you a little bit on that this morning on this 10th anniversary of the founding, or the establishment of the parish and the consecration of the church, and invite you to reflect on what I say about the Gospel might be saying to you, about your lives, as individual people, as people in your families, as people in your community, and as people who are part of this parish, I think it's an important reflection to make.

But in order to make it, I just wanted to mention two other things at the start, that I hope you can keep in mind as I do reflect on the parable. And the first is that on Friday, last Friday, we celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord.

Many of you would be aware of that very beautiful and traditional Catholic prayer, the Angelus which begins, "The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit." And then it goes on. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

The Feast of the Annunciation really reminds us of who Jesus is; not just a wonderful man of God, which he certainly was, not just a great teacher, and preacher, and healer, which he certainly was, but the Son of God, God Himself among us, as one of us. And what that means is that when Jesus, the man speaks, it's God who's speaking. When Jesus the man reaches out to someone, it's God reaching out. When Jesus, the man heals someone, it's God healing them.

And I think it's really important to keep that in mind. Because in the parable of the prodigal son, or sometimes better called the parable of the Son, and of the father and his two sons.

When Jesus speaks that parable, it's God speaking to us about who he God the Father is. So, we can trust this parable completely. That's important to say, because it's rather a shocking parable. The second part, or idea that I just wanted to remind you of, is this. The year after I was appointed as the Archbishop, Pope Francis was appointed as the pope after the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI. And one of the things that Pope Francis has done, is to invite the church to reflect deeply on Jesus as the face of the Father's mercy. So, this Jesus that I've just been



speaking about, who is God among us, is particularly for us, the face of the Father's mercy. And it is as the face of the Father's mercy, and the Word of the Father's mercy, that He preaches today's parable. I won't repeat it all, you know it very well, we hear it so often. And as I say, it's one of the most beautiful, and most loved parables of Jesus. But it's just important to notice a couple of things. When the youngest son comes to his father, and asks, or really demands his share of the inheritance, that's a really disrespectful thing for the son to do. When the father responds positively, by giving him his share of the inheritance, that says deeply shocking thing for the father to do, particularly in the Jewish context. So right from the start of this parable, the father acts in a way that most fathers wouldn't, most parents wouldn't. And that's important to notice. So then off goes the Son, and we're told that he wastes all of his money in a life of debauchery, and ends up in a pigsty looking after the pigs, and being if you like, a little jealous of the pigs, because they've got food to eat, and he has nothing. That would be the most demeaning job of all, to be looking after a herd of pigs because pigs were regarded as unclean animals in the Jewish tradition. So the son couldn't have sunk any lower. And then, so Luke tells us in his Gospel that the son came to his senses. And he says, "even the servants at home are better off than I am here."

So then he starts to come up with a plan. I'll go home. And I'll say to my father, and then he comes up with this beautiful speech. And you can imagine him practicing it over and over and over, as he sets out from where he is, and returns home. Father, I've sinned against God and against you, I'm not worthy to be called your son, treat me as one of your servants, make me one of your hired slaves. And he's practicing this over and over. Now, so Luke's Gospel isn't very clear about whether there was a deep conversion in the son, or he was just smart enough to know what would target his father's heart and make the father taking back. So, I always imagine this son walking. Getting it right, everything depends on him winning his father over. So he's walking along, and then we're told in the Gospel that father saw him I coming, think about that. What that's hinting at is that ever since the son left, the father's put the rest of his life on hold, hoping that each sound will come back. And he's out there, sitting at the window in the front room, watching to see if his son will come back. So then, he spots his son, he comes running out to meet him, he goes up to him, and the son sees him coming, launches into his speech, Father, I have sinned against God and against you, etc, etc. The great thing about that is that before the Son can even get to the end of his speech, particularly the bit about treating me as one of your hired servants, the father has thrown his arms around him, given him a big hug, call to the other servants, get a ring and put it on his finger, get new sandals, put them on his feet, we are going to have a party.

Now, when I read that parable, and I'm not a parent, but when I read that parable, I can't help thinking that many parents who reads this would be thinking, what is that Father doing? How is his son ever going to learn his lesson? If he just comes back, after this terrible thing that he's done, and the father doesn't even criticize him about it. The parable, of course, is that God as our Father doesn't act the way most parents might act. God our father doesn't look at us when we have sinned and failed and think, "Well, now I've got to punish them. Now they've got to be



taught their lesson. Now I've got to do something to make sure they don't do it again." The father does do something. But what does he do? He throws his arms around his son, and gives him a big hug, and welcomes him back and throws a party to celebrate.

We might say that this father, from the very beginning of the story, to the end of the story, does all the wrong things. He should never have let the son go, he certainly should have given him the money. And when he came back, he should have done something to make sure the son had understood the mistake he'd made. But the father in the parable is all about mercy, and forgiveness. Not about holding grudges, not about making people pay, just welcoming back someone who has got lost and who has now found his way home. It's a beautiful parable. But it's rather a shocking parable, because it leaves us with a question. Do we dare to believe that God is as good as this?

One of the reasons why Jesus was rejected by so many of the people of his own time, was precisely because they couldn't cope with the image of God, His father, that Jesus was putting forward to them. It was too good to be true, we might almost say, and it still is. And I think that's the great challenge of Christianity as a religion of our Catholic faith, as the faith that we follow. At the heart of our faith, is belief in an unbelievably generous and merciful and compassionate and forgiving God. This is the God we come together to worship and to celebrate and to listen to, and to take into our lives so that we can then take this God with us as we leave mass and go out into the world to spread this Good News about what God is really like. And how do we spread it? We spread it by showing in our way of dealing with people, the same compassion and mercy and forgiveness and large heartedness. This, I think, pretty well sums up the vocation of your parish.

To help each other, to grow more and more into a community, which is a living image, a living reflection of this merciful, compassionate, loving, generous, forgiving Father. That it's a living image of the presence of Jesus in our world who brings this compassion and love and forgiveness of God into our lives. So, I wanted on this special day, this 10th anniversary, to really go, I think, put a challenge before us all because the challenge for every single one of us. And the question we could ask ourselves is, in my own relationships with my husband, or my wife, with my children, with my parents, with my friends, with my colleagues, with the fellow members of my parish, how am I going at being a living image of this loving and merciful Father? And as a parish community here in this part of Perth in Ellenbrook? How are you all going together at being a community, which reflects this wonderful image of God, to the people who live in this part of Perth?

This, I think, is what we're focusing on when we celebrate an anniversary like this. I think it's also however, an invitation for us to ask ourselves or to acknowledge rather, how well perhaps this is already happening. None of us is perfect. None of us will get it right all the time. But I don't think you should be embarrassed to look at the ways in which your parish community is already this, maybe not as much as you could be, maybe not as much as you'd like to be. But



you're not beginning with a blank page. This is already a thriving parish community, a Catholic parish community. So what I wanted to do today was to encourage you to continue to work together, together with Father Bonner, to grow more and more into this kind of community.

In the end, if Jesus is the face of the Father's mercy, and we are the body of Christ, with Jesus as our leader, that we are meant to be the face of the Father's mercy in communion with Him. Thank you for all the ways in which you are already the face of the Father's mercy. The opportunity that this anniversary gives you, to recommit yourself as a parish community to continue along this path and grow more and more into this living image of God, our loving Father.

*Transcribed*