



Rite of Election

Homily

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

**Thursday 10 March, 2022
Thursday 17 March, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

On 28 August in the year 430 one of the greatest figures in Christian history, Saint Augustine of Hippo, died at the age of 76.

Saint Augustine is famous for many things but one of them is his own autobiography, which is popularly known as the “Confessions of Saint Augustine”. It is quite a long book and, interestingly, it is written in the form of a prayer. The book begins with these words: *“The human person is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud, but still, since he is a part of your creation, he wishes to praise you”*. In many ways the rest of the book is a hymn, a song of praise for all the wonderful things that God did for Saint Augustine and which God continues to do for all God’s people. At the end of the book, over 300 pages later, Saint Augustine concludes with these words: *“You, Lord, are goodness itself and need no good besides yourself. You are forever at rest because you are your own repose. Who can teach another to understand this truth? What angel can teach it to another angel? What angel can teach it to a human person? We must ask it of you, seek it in you. We must knock at your door. Only then shall we receive what we ask and find what we seek. Only then will the door be open to us”*.

This idea of seeking God is at the very centre of the journey of life and faith which Saint Augustine speaks about in his Confessions. As we gather here tonight in the Cathedral to celebrate the Rite of Election, it seems to me that each one of you here has been on the same journey of life and faith, and that you have reached a stage in that journey where you believe that you have at least begun to glimpse just where that journey is leading you. In a very concrete sense it has led you to the Cathedral this evening, but in a deeper sense it has led you to that community of the disciples of Jesus who see in this Cathedral a symbol of their spiritual home: it has led you to the Catholic Church.

As the Archbishop of Perth, and in the name of the Catholic community, I want to say to you tonight that you are very welcome. I also want to say that you come as a precious gift to us. Your courage in following the call which in one way or another you have experienced in your life’s journey is a reminder to us of the wonderful gift of faith which we, as Catholics, can often



take for granted. Your presence here tonight, and your ongoing presence in the local Catholic community of which you will become a part, will be a powerful reminder to us of just how important faith is. Your faith will strengthen ours and this can't help but make our witness to the world in which we all live so much more powerful and credible.

In many ways the whole journey of faith which unfolds in Saint Augustine's *Confessions* is summed up in these words which we find within the body of the text: "*You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*"

I think we all know instinctively what Saint Augustine is talking about when he speaks about our restless hearts. The stirring of faith within you, whether it has been a long-standing reality or something quite new, will in one way or another be connected to a restlessness which you have felt along the way. In Saint Augustine's experience that restlessness was an indication that he had not yet fully opened his mind and his heart to God. As he reflected back on his life Saint Augustine recognised that he had been looking for fulfilment, for peace, and for meaning in all the wrong places. Finally, he realised that it could only be found in God.

Looking in all the wrong places: in a sense this is exactly what the temptations of Jesus, which are set out for us in tonight's gospel, are really all about.

The first temptation centres around the need to satisfy our hunger. The devil tempts Jesus to use his power to turn stones into bread and tries to convince him that if he does so he will be satisfied. The response of Jesus points in another direction: "*We do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" Jesus, of course, is not denying his need for bread or pretending that his hunger does not need to be attended to, but he is inviting us to make sure that we know where our priorities lie and what the most important things in life really are. To feed on the bread of God's Word and to find our strength in him: *this is what will still our restless hearts.*

The second temptation is a very subtle one. At first glance it looks like an invitation to really put your trust in God and God's protection. "Throw yourself off the temple parapet," says the devil, "and God's angels will keep you safe." But what a strange image of God this really is! We must not be so cavalier and reckless with the precious gift of life which God has given us. We cannot expect God to come to our rescue every time we do something foolish or sinful. One of the most precious gifts of God is the gift of our freedom but, of course, with the gift of freedom comes the responsibility of using our freedom wisely. This second temptation reminds us of the need to make sure that the God we believe in, the God we seek to obey and follow, is the true God as he is made known to us in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. *It is by committing ourselves to Jesus as our Way and our Truth and our Life that we will still our restless hearts.*



The third temptation is the temptation to grasp at power and control over others. *“Worship me”,* says Satan, *“and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world”*. But in reply Jesus says that true peace and serenity will not be found in exercising power and control over others but rather in being part of the kingdom of God. We are all brothers and sisters together, because we all have the one Father. *Jesus teaches us that it is by committing ourselves to this Father, to this kingdom, that we will still our restless hearts.*

Tonight, through this Rite of Election, you take a very significant step in your own journey of life and faith. Entering into full communion with all your brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church will not automatically resolve all your challenges or answer all your questions. You will discover and, I hope, will not be too surprised to discover, that Catholics are as much a mixed bag as any other group of people. But you will also discover, and should expect and hope to discover, that in this community of faith you will also find companions on your journey, fellow pilgrims who like you are seeking to still their restless hearts and find their peace in God. In the end, in and through belonging to this community of faith, you will find Jesus, who says to you tonight, as surely as he said to his first disciples, *“Come to me all you who labour and overburdened, and I will give you rest.”*