



**Feast of Christ the King (Year C)
Launch of World Youth Day 2023**

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 20 November, 2022
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As I mentioned at the beginning of Mass, we have gathered in the Cathedral to celebrate the Eucharist and mark the official opening of the World Youth Day experience for the Archdiocese of Perth.

I hope you feel excited because I certainly do. For many of you, the experience of World Youth Day, especially if you are able to travel to Portugal, could be a life-changing experience. I have been to three World Youth Days myself - Sydney, Brazil, and Poland - and I know that many people come home transformed. And for those who are not able to go, but who follow the events of World Youth Day on social media and in other ways that we might be able to organise here in the Archdiocese, you too may find yourselves looking at life differently.

What is it about World Youth Day that has this effect on so many people? For some it is the opportunity to travel overseas for the first time. For others it is the experience of being with other young people who are passionate about their faith. Often young people who still go to Mass and value their faith can feel lonely and isolated. For them it is a remarkable and exciting experience to be with hundreds of thousands, and perhaps even millions, of young people from all around the world for whom being catholic is not a burden but a joy.

In the end, however, I am convinced that the secret power of World Youth Day is the fact that it always ends up putting the Lord Jesus back at the heart of our understanding of what it means to be a Christian and especially a Christian in our Catholic tradition.

People sometimes get some weird ideas about the Catholic Church. This is true of those who are outside looking in, but also true sometimes of those who are inside and looking around them. Some people see the Catholic Church as an institution with lots of rules and regulations which are designed to control our lives. Other people see the Church as an outdated institution that doesn't know how to move with the times and adapt to the realities of our modern society. Others again see it as an institution governed by bishops and priests who often have no real sense of what real life is like.

Maybe some of you, too, see the Church in this way, but this afternoon I want to challenge you to think again and look again. It is certainly true that the Church is an institution. It has leaders and structures



and all those other things which are a part of every institution. The Church needs them because without them it could not have survived for the last two thousand years.

But what many people fail to see is what lies at the heart of the institution - and of course when I say *what* I should really be saying *who*. And of course, the answer to the question of who is at the heart of the Church is not Archbishop Tim or Pope Francis, or the Cardinals or anybody else. The answer is a name - Jesus Christ - and unless we begin to understand that and think deeply about what it means we will never understand the Church and we may even walk away from the Church, but in doing so, we run the risk of walking away from Jesus himself.

Why do I say that? In a way this evening's second reading gives us the answer: it says of Jesus that he is *the image of the unseen God*. This is an extraordinary thing: to say that a man, a human being, can be the image and the presence of God among us. How can the fulness of God, who made everything that exists, be found in a single man? And yet this is what we believe. And if this doesn't blow our minds, we're probably not thinking deeply enough about it. Jesus is the most extraordinary gift of God to us because he makes the unknown God know to us in a way that we can understand. He lived a life. He had a history. He was born. He grew up. He worked. He taught. He prayed. He preached. He healed. He was cruelly and viciously executed. He rose from the dead and returned to his place with his Father in heaven. And from there he sent his Holy Spirit to the early community of his disciples. From that moment the Church was born, it has travelled through history ever since, and it is here tonight as we gather in the cathedral.

Tonight's second reading goes on to tell us another extraordinary thing: the Church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of his body.

To belong to the Church is to be a part of Christ's body and to be united to him in a relationship of friendship and love. He is closer to us in the Church than we are to each other. He is closer to us even than we are to ourselves.

It is this that comes home so powerfully through World Youth Days. They are full of energy, full of excitement, full of passion and most of all they are full of faith. The most powerful and life-changing moment in any World Youth Day is the evening before the final Mass when everybody, and sometimes it is millions of people, kneels in silent prayer and adoration before the Lord Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament. It is at that moment that the truth about the Church becomes clear. It is all about us together supporting each other, turning our eyes to Christ, recognising him as our friend, as our Lord, as the one we want to follow and the one who sends us out to others. It seems to me that until we understand this, we will never really understand the Church.

Tonight we celebrate the feast of Christ, the King and next Sunday we will celebrate the first Sunday of Advent and begin to look towards Christmas. It is a strange thing, isn't it, to think that a king would be born in poverty in a humble shed in a little out of the way place like Bethlehem. It is an even stranger thing to think that a king would end up brutally, tortured and crucified as tonight's gospel reminds us.



To follow this king will not be easy. Some people will think we are crazy or dangerous and that the best way to deal with us is to marginalise us or vilify us or cancel us. So yes, to follow this king will require great courage and great fidelity. It is my hope that World Youth Day 2023 will become a source of that courage and that fidelity for all of you and that you will come to see that you have a place and a home in the Church and that your mission is to help the rest of us to be that living presence of Christ in our families, among our friends, and in our society. This is certainly what I am praying for tonight.