



## **Blessing of New Icons**

### **Homily**

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Redemptoris Mater Seminary, Morley**

Some of you would be aware that I have just returned from some meetings in Rome, to do with the preparations for the Synod of Bishops which will take place in October of this year.

I suspect that the decision of Pope Francis to call a Synod to discuss the whole question of what the Lord is asking of the church at this moment in our history, will go down as one of the most significant parts of his papacy. I think the other thing that will go down as another significant part of his papacy, which is intimately connected with his calling of the Synod, is his decision some years ago to convene what he called the Year of Mercy.

I think we only understand either of those in the light of the other, because I find myself drawn more and more into the preparations for the Synod, it's becoming even clearer to me, as each day goes by just how important the link between these two things is. As some of you know, we had a worldwide consultation, leading up to Synod, asking people of God, hopefully many of you were part of it, to share with the whole church, your dreams and your hopes and your concerns for the church as we move into the future.

As a result of that worldwide consultation, all kinds of issues have arisen. Some quite controversial, some that other people would feel a little uneasy about, others that everybody would agree with.

But it is important to understand, and the Pope keeps insisting on this and so does the Cardinal in charge of this whole process, that the Synod is not about any particular issue. The Synod is not about coming up with an answer to any particular question. The Synod is about how the people of God can be together, that God is calling us to be together at this time in our history. How can we together be more faithful people of God? How can the church be the church that the Lord wants us to be? That is what the Synod is about. That is why I think, the calling of the Synod is so closely tied to the Pope's decision those few years ago, to have the Year of Mercy.

Because at the heart of that Year of Mercy, was this insight of the Pope's - and not really his, it's been the insight of Christianity from the beginning - that Jesus is the face of the Father's Mercy. That Jesus is the one who comes to reveal to us the truth about who God really is, and the truth



that Jesus reveals is that God is the Father of Mercy. All of that becomes very clear, I think, when we reflect on tonight's gospel.

That's why I wanted to begin by putting tonight's gospel in the context of this invitation, but it is more than an invitation, an urgent call by Pope Francis has given us to become more truly the church that God wants us to be.

In tonight's gospel, we find presented to us, perhaps the clearest statement in the whole of the New Testament about what the final judgment will be all about. The final judgement will be about whether or not we reflected the face of the Father's Mercy to everybody we meet.

I was hungry, and out of mercy and love and compassionate care, you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and out of mercy and compassion and love and care, you gave me something to drink. I was sick and you visited me. I was naked and you clothed me. We could go through each one of these and each one of them is a call about what a compassionate merciful response looks like, and that's what the church is called to be. That is what we're all called to be. I said that this is the passage perhaps more clearly than any other in the New Testament, which speaks about the final judgment.

But in fact, it's not about the final judgement, it is about the final revelation of the way in which we have judged ourselves. Because it will be all about whether or not I have been a person of mercy. We will judge ourselves, our actions or our lack of action will judge us, God won't do the judging, our lives will be the judgment. So, there is this urgent call to be the people of mercy, because Jesus is the face of the Father's Mercy.

We heard about Jesus appearing to His disciples on the night of the resurrection and saying to them, as the Father sent me, so I am sending you, not the Father sent me for now I am going to send you, but as the Father sent me, so I am sending you. How and why did the Father send Jesus to be the face of the Father's Mercy? So how and why does Jesus send us to be the face of the Father's mercy? This is what it is to be a Christian. This is the way in which we construct the lives that will eventually hopefully lead us to the fullness of life with the Lord in heaven, so beautifully portrayed in the icon behind me.

So tonight, I simply wanted to encourage all of us, particularly considering what Pope Francis is asking of us to enter this process of beginning to learn again, what it is to be the church. Pope Francis says to us, that we must stop being an inward-looking church, worrying too much about ourselves, and become an outward looking Church, which sees the needs of the world as Jesus saw the needs of the people he encountered, and responds to him.

The logic of the gospel is forgetting about ourselves and turning our eyes away from ourselves to others. We will be true disciples of Jesus, who didn't worry about what suited Him, but worried only about the needs of the people he encountered.



So tonight, as we contemplate the beauty of this icon of the risen Lord, who connects both heaven and earth, who connects our life now with the fullness of life, to which he calls us, let us allow ourselves to be challenged by this Gospel.

I was hungry, and did you do something about it. I was thirsty, and you responded to my need. We need to pray for eyes that are open to see the needs of God's people, or ears that are open to hear the cries of God's people and for hearts that are open, so that we will want to respond and know how to respond to all those in need.