



**Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Archdiocesan Staff Christmas Mass**

Homily

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

**Friday 8 December 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

We gather this morning here in the Cathedral as a way of marking the end of the year by recognising all the great work which has been done over the last 12 months.

Many other organisations will be gathering for much the same reason over the next few weeks in the lead up to the Christmas break. I think it is safe to say, however, that not too many of them will be doing so in such an explicitly religious, Christian and Catholic setting.

In making this observation I am not for a moment, wanting to be critical of other organisations. We live in a multicultural, multi-faith and highly secularised society, and the health and well-being of such a society depends not just on tolerance of the point of view of others, but of respect for the point of view of others. Tolerance is an important value in a society such as ours, but it can carry the connotation of a “live and let live” attitude which can lead to a fragmented society in which each cultural, ethnic or religious group lives in its own little world, cocooned from too much contact with anybody else. Respect, on the other hand, is a value which involves or invites dialogue and encounter and a willingness to recognise not only what distinguishes us from others but also what we have in common with others.

In a respectful society, the various communities which make up that society are welcomed, and their distinctiveness is seen as an asset for a harmonious society, rather than a threat to a harmonious society. For religious communities in particular, one way of understanding this notion of distinctiveness is to speak of what I would call the particular world view which underpins and informs everything the religious community seeks to do, and to be, within the society in which it lives and operates.

I mention all this because the fact that we gather to celebrate the end of the year here in the Cathedral points to an absolutely foundational dimension of the Catholic worldview which I believe can be expressed in three profoundly inter-related convictions: that God exists; that the truth of who God is fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ who is God among us as one of us; and that



the Church exists to keep alive, and offer to everyone as a gift, the memory and on-going presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

As we think about the year that is rapidly coming to its end, and reflect on all that has been achieved, I want as the Archbishop of Perth to thank all of you for the ways in which you have helped the Church here in our part of the world to witness to this threefold truth. To the extent that we have been successful, in our efforts in our own particular role within the Archdiocese, to reveal this face of the Church to each other, to the wider community of the Church, and to our society, we can come to the end of the year with a sense of pride and of a job well done. And to the extent that there have been, perhaps, moments when we have struggled to reveal this face of the Church (and we all have such moments - that is why we always ask for God's forgiveness when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist) we might recognise and embrace the invitation this offers us to renew our efforts next year.

We can and should be enormously proud of all the good that the Church in this archdiocese does not only for the Catholic community but also, through our schools, our hospitals, and our agencies, for the wider community. We are after all, as followers of Christ, called to put our words and our faith into action. As the Letter of Saint James reminds us, "faith without good works is dead. But as Pope Francis reminds us often, as did his predecessor Pope Benedict, we must also be on our guard not to fall into the trap of thinking of ourselves, or presenting ourselves, as simply another NGO, as simply another social welfare organisation. We base ourselves on the belief that God has called the Church into being and, we must therefore say, has called the Archdiocese of Perth into being, in order to be a living and credible witness to God's saving and transforming love. This is the deepest marker of our identity as an organisation and if we lose this we lose our way. The celebration of Christmas, of the birth of Christ, reminds us that God's way is one of simplicity, of humility, and of generous self-giving. This is who we are as the archdiocese of Perth - or at least who we aspire to be. Thank you all for all the ways you are helping us to be, more and more, what God is asking us to be.