



**Sixth Sunday Ordinary Time Year A  
75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Scarborough Parish**

**Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 12 February 2023  
Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Scarborough**

To many of you gathered here in the church this morning, 75 years must have seemed like at least a lifetime ago and maybe two or three lifetimes ago.

But for some of us, it doesn't feel like that long ago. The Church and the parish is a little older than me, but not much, because I look around the church this morning, I think there are probably some people who've been able to stretch back a little further than I do, in thinking about the history of this parish.

1948, the Second World War had just finished a few years before. It was a very different time in the life of the church, to the time in which we're now living through.

Certainly, in the parish, where I grew up in Melbourne, Victoria, there were five morning Masses on the Sunday, 7am, 8am, 9am 10am and 11am. And the car park, which was very large, because it was a very big parish and school, it was a bit of a nightmare to negotiate in between Masses, because people were coming in and others were going out. I suspect, we don't have quite that problem here at Scarborough sadly anymore.

Not only were the churches full on the weekends, but so were the seminaries, and the monasteries and convents – they were all overflowing.

Some of you know that I'm a Salesian and I well remember that we had built one unit of 20 bedrooms to cater for our seminarians - it was to be the first of six. Luckily, we stopped at just one, and we had trouble filling that up.

But in the 1940s, and 50s, and even 60s, things looked very different. But as I look back on those things, the thing that strikes me most forcefully is that when I was a boy growing up, the values of my family, and the values of the Catholic school to which my mum and dad sent both my brother and me, were pretty much indistinguishable from the values of the society around us.

And it seems to me that if we had to pick one thing that is different about our experience of the Church today, from that of the past, from that other time with this parish was established, it wouldn't be this.

We are now trying to live our Christian life, our life of discipleship in a society which doesn't support the values that are important to us, in the way that the society used to be.



That means that the Church really needs to think carefully about how we are to convey the message of Christ in a very different situation, in a very different context.

And when I say the Church, I could be referring to the church all around the world, I could be referred to the church here in our Archdiocese. And I could be, and am, referring to the church that gathers here in this parish. We all share in this huge challenge which we haven't faced before. How do we live our faith. How do we remain faithful to our faith in the midst of a culture and a society which does not offer the support and the encouragement that it once did.

In many ways the question that arises for all of us then is, what must we do?

What are we called to do and be as a Church at this particular time in our history?

And being in this parish on this day, that's a question that I would like to address to all of you and for all of you who are visitors, who perhaps have an older connection with this parish, and now belong to another one, it's still a question that I'd ask us all to consider.

What is the Lord asking of us, now, at this time in our history, which is in some respects, so different from us?

We can and we should, I believe, look back over the last 75 years of the life of this parish with great gratitude.

Maybe even with a little bit of nostalgia, but also with realism. We can't go back and be the church of the 1940s or the 1960s, because the world has moved and the Church must move with it.

So, the question is, what must we do? What is God asking of us? And as many of you will be aware, that's exactly the question that the Catholic Church of Australia, including the Catholic Church here in Perth, has been pondering for the last few years as we went through the experience of the Plenary Council.

The Fifth Plenary Council of the Church of Australia, the first one since 1937. This church wasn't even here the last time we had a Plenary Council. A Plenary Council is a gathering up the whole church, lay people, religious, priests, bishops, all together trying to discern the answer to that fundamental question; What is God asking of us, at this moment?

In one sense, I was often asked this question and in one sense I can sum it up in one word, and it's the word that's at the beginning of our first reading this morning.

Faithfulness. Fidelity. Still, today, 2023, God is asking us the same thing he asked of those who first founded this parish. To be faithful to the gift of faith that He has given to us. But what does it mean, in 2023?

Possibly not exactly the same as it meant in 1948.

In between the founding of this parish, and now of course, the church had the experience of the Second Vatican Council.



The gathering of all the bishops in the 1960s, really, to answer the very same question at that period in our church's history. What is God calling us to, What is God asking of us? And one of the many elements of the answer they gave at that time was, we are being called to read the sides of the times, to look around us in other words, and acknowledge the realities we face, and then try and work out from there, how we should respond.

But sometimes people forget that at the Second Vatican Council, the bishops who gathered said, they we're called to recognise the signs of the times and then interpret them in the light of the Gospel. It doesn't mean that we simply say, 'Well, this is the latest thing that's happening' or 'This is the latest point of view that our society is adopting, so therefore, we have to go along with it, perhaps we should.'

But the real question is, how do we bring the wisdom of the Gospel – the wisdom that our second reading talks about? How do we bring the wisdom of the gospel to the realities that we face today.

As I think many of know I belong to a religious order, the Salesians of St John Bosco that were founded by St John Bosco, and he didn't name them after himself. He named them after Saint Francis de Sales which is why they are called the Salesians.

So, Francis De Sales, was a bishop in the 16th century. He was famous for many things, but one of the things he was famous for was that he was a very popular spiritual director.

And one of the people he directed was a young woman, and widow, who had a number of small children, but she had a deep sense of call from God to the religious life.

She used to go and talk about all this to St Francis, and he would try to help her understand what God was asking of her.

And then I think, eventually got a little frustrated with her and he said, Look, it's quite possible that at some stage in the future, God might be calling you to the religious life.

But if you want to know what God is asking of you today, look around you.

What he was saying to her, of course, she was a young widow, with five young children who still needed her. She couldn't go off and join the convent because her children needed her.

She was being called to recognise the signs of the times, and interpret them, understand them and respond to them in the body of the Gospel. That advice of Francis, besides his advice about the quantity, each one of us individually, as we try to negotiate our faithful living of our discipleship in the world in which we live at this particular stage, but not just to us as individuals, to us as families, to us as a parish family, to us as a community of Catholics here in the Archdiocese.

Let's look at around us. Let's see what the needs are and let's ask ourselves, how is God asking us to respond? This is exactly what our present Holy Father, Pope Francis is inviting us to at this moment in our history. We are going through at the moment, the preparations for a Synod of Bishops, and at the heart of the Synod of Bishops really is the Pope's call to us to become what he would call a community of missionary disciples.



A community that recognises that in being given the gift of faith, we haven't been chosen by God because we're better than everybody else, or because God likes us more than he likes everybody else. We've been chosen because God is asking us to be the ones through whom this wonderful gift of faith that we've received can be taken out and shared with others.

Everything, he says, in the life of the church, whether it's at the universal level, or at the level of the parish, here in Scarborough, everything has to be rethought in terms of this fundamental thing.

So this is my question really, or my challenge to you I guess, as we celebrate 75 years.

How can this community which has a long history of fidelity to the Lord and to his Church, how can you become a community which takes this wonderful gift of faith in the Lord, this wonderful gift of faith in Jesus Christ, and takes it beyond the walls of this church, beyond the confines of your families, beyond the confines of your immediate circles, and makes it a vibrant presence here in this part of Perth, and in all of those people with whom we meet.

That's what it is to be community of faith. That's what it is that Pope Francis is inviting us to, how can we move from being a community, which may be inwardly looking, to a community that looks beyond itself and sees the desperate needs of our society, for the gift of faith, for the way, the truth and the life that is Jesus. How can we offer this to others.

You belong to a parish that is dedicated to our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Heart. Another phrase that would carry exactly the same meaning is, 'The faithful Heart of Mary'. Through all of the challenges and difficulties that she faced, she was a faithful disciple. In fact, many people would point to her and say, she was the first and the best disciple of Jesus.

I encourage you to reflect on the story of Mary, allow Fr Christian to help you enter more deeply into the mystery of the story of Mary. The one whom from the very beginning said, 'Here I am, the Servant of the Lord, let whatever you want be done in my life'. That's the model that we're called to follow. She is the woman we should allow to challenge us. She is the one for whom we can pray, asking her to pray for us, that the Lord will give us faithful hearts, hearts of people who know that they can and want to be, signs and bears of the love of God for all.

*Transcribed*