



## **Dedication and Opening of St John Paul II Church, Banksia Grove**

### **Homily**

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

**Wednesday 26 January, 2023  
St John Paul II Church, Banksia Grove**

*“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.”*

These words are very familiar to all of us. On this day in particular, as we bless this new Church dedicated to Pope Saint John Paul II and solemnly consecrate the altar, we are invited to reflect on them and allow them to enter deeply into our minds and hearts. The Church, of which we are all a part, looks back to that first group of disciples whom Jesus gathered around him, with Peter as their leader. It is the Church to which Jesus gave the gift of his Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is the Church which, from those early beginnings, set out on a journey which has lasted for over two thousand years. And it is the Church which gathers, here in this place, on this day, as we come together and come, rejoicing, into the house of God.

When Saint Paul says, in our second reading, that we are “part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations and Christ Jesus himself for its cornerstone” he is reminding us that the Church is not something of our own creation. Nor is it something that we can mold and shape according to our own desires. Rather it is a precious gift from God which God invites us to receive with gratitude and joy and cherish and protect with great care and love. As Saint John Paul II was so fond of saying, the Church is a community of the disciples of Christ, a community whose vocation is to be built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit.

It is this vocation – to be a community of disciples of the Lord, to be a place where God lives – which explains why what we are doing here today is so important. This building, which in one sense is just bricks and mortar, is in reality so much more. It is, indeed, the house of God. It is the place where God will be at work building up his people into a dwelling place fit for him. It is where people, often though not always young babies, will be plunged into the waters of baptism (over there in the baptismal font) and given the gift of a new life filled with the grace of Christ. It is the place, (over there in the Confessional room) where the power of God’s compassion and mercy will set people free from the burden of their sins and failures through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the place where people will be renewed and strengthened through the gift of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. It is the place where here, before the altar, a man and a woman will commit themselves to each other for life in the Sacrament of Marriage, thus becoming a sign of Christ’s love for his Church which is his bride. It is the place where friends and families will



gather in sorrow, but also in hope, to entrust their loved ones who have died to the overwhelming compassion and mercy of God as they enter into the mystery of eternal life. It is the place where people will come, carrying the secrets of their hearts with them, into the presence of the Lord who remains with us in the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament, there in the Tabernacle.

This church will be, in other words, a place of encounter with God, who has chosen to make himself known to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who is for us our Way, our Truth and our Life. All of this comes together in the most important thing which can ever happen in this church and which will happen every day. It all comes together in the celebration of the Eucharist – in the Mass. This is why, at the very heart of this beautiful ceremony today, we have the consecration of the altar, upon which the Lord's Last Supper, which prefigures his death on the cross, is celebrated.

It is no accident that the centre of our Catholic faith is a celebration in which a community of disciples is called, together, to turn our gaze to the Lord Jesus, to listen carefully to his Word, and to receive him, not just symbolically but rather sacramentally, that is to say really, into our lives. It is when we gather as a community of disciples to celebrate the Eucharist together that we both experience and demonstrate who we really are: not isolated individuals finding our way to God on our own, but brothers and sisters who have, in God's mercy, been given the gift of faith.

This gift is not simply the gift of belonging to a community of like-minded people: it is a gift, and a promise, of communion with God, in Jesus, through the power of God's Holy Spirit. And because it is the gift of communion with the Lord, it is also the gift of communion with all whom the Lord calls to himself through faith. We belong to each other, are responsible for each other, and called to love and serve each other. We cannot truly be in communion with the Lord, one with him, if we are not in communion with each other, or at least trying to be. This is why communion and unity within the Church, at the parish level, at the level of the diocese, and at the universal level through our communion with the Bishop of Rome, is such an important part of who we are as Catholics.

Today, the Lord is asking you to see this new church building as a powerful symbol of all that he is calling you to be. All the sacraments which will be celebrated here, all the silent prayers which will be offered here, all the tears which will be shed here, all the joy which will be shared here, will only have meaning if we understand who we are as the people of God, who we are as the community of the disciples of Jesus, and what it is that God is asking of us. In the end everything that will be a part of the life of this church building, and of the parish it is built to serve, will only make sense if Jesus is the heart and soul of this building, of this community of faith, and of our Church. As Saint Paul reminds us, nobody can lay any other foundation than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ.

This, then, is my prayer for you all on this very important day in the story of your parish: that in whatever you do, you will always have Jesus deliberately, consciously and clearly at the heart of it all. Allow him to draw you together in unity, ask him to reveal himself more fully to you in all that



happens within these walls, pray for each other that you can be faithful to him, and thank him, often and sincerely, for the precious gift of your life, of your faith, of Fr Vinh and Deacon Nicholas, and of all those who have worked together to make the new church a reality. And may you all, together, be signs and bearers of God's love to all whom you meet.