



**13th Sunday Ordinary Time (Year A)
100th Anniversary of Palmyra Parish**

Homily

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

**Sunday 23 July, 2023
Our Lady of Fatima Church, Palmyra**

*All the nations shall come to adore you and glorify your name, O Lord,
For you are great and do marvellous deeds, you who alone are God.*

These words from Psalm 85, which today's liturgy offers us in the Responsorial Psalm, capture something of the joy which I suspect many of us feel as we gather in this church dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima to celebrate the 100th anniversary of your parish. In reflecting on this psalm as I was preparing some thoughts for today's Mass, some words of Pope Francis, originally addressed to religious priests, brothers and nuns, came to my mind. They express well, I think, what the Lord might be asking of us as we do gather together here: *Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope*". God is great and **has** done marvelous deeds over the long history of this parish. God continues to do great things, in a world and a Church which is in many ways very different from the world and the Church of 1923, and we have trust that as the future unfolds God will continue to do great things even as the world and the Church undergo even more changes. Above all else we Christians are people of hope, not because we are naïve or hopelessly optimistic, but because we know that ultimately the Church is God's, not ours, and he promised to be with his Church until the end of time.

All of you who are either current members or friends of the parish, or past parishioners, know that the parish community of today is the inheritor of the extraordinary commitment of the clergy, the religious and the laity who over one hundred years have built this community of faith. You would also understand that it is the task of today's parish community to keep this faith alive so that future generations will receive what we faithfully pass on to them with gratitude. This is why Pope Francis would ask us not only to look back in gratitude, which we do in a special way today, but also to live the present moment, with all its challenges, with passion and remain open and hopeful as the future unfolds.

As I mentioned a moment ago the world of 2023 and the Church of 2023 are very different from the world and the Church of 1923. The first community which formed this parish so long ago could not have imagined what lay ahead. The First World War had only finished five years previously and people would still have been trying to put their lives back together. The Great Depression was soon to engulf the nation, and the world, and before Australia had fully recovered from this



disaster the world was once again plunged into war. In those early decades we can imagine how important the faith was to many people. This parish would have been no exception. In a world of conflict, uncertainty and great suffering, when evil seemed to be so powerful, all people could do was look to the Lord and pray, as the psalm does, *You, God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and rich in love and truth, turn and take pity on us.*

In spite of the dramatic changes which have taken place over the last one hundred years, this prayer is as relevant today as it ever was. We may not be engulfed in a World War but we have only to think of the people of Ukraine to realise that war is as destructive and as senseless today as in the past. We may not be caught up in a “Great Depression” but we only have to walk through the streets of the city and see the number of homeless people sleeping on the streets to be faced with the reality of the poverty and the desperation of so many in our society.

As the Christians of today we cannot look on as mere observers of these realities. We are participators in them and even sometimes, to our shame, contributors to them. This is the very point which today’s gospel seeks to make. The Kingdom of God into which we were all baptised, and of which this parish is a part, is not free of the presence of evil and suffering. The weeds of evil, the dandelion, thrive in the Church as they do in the wider world. Our recent history, and the revelations of the Royal Commission, have made this painfully clear. We know that among the many things the Lord is asking of us today, our determination to rebuild ourselves as a community of true discipleship where everyone is safe and cared for, is central to our response to God’s grace.

But if it is true that evil exists even among us, it is also true that the Lord remains with us, that he is *slow to anger and rich in love and truth*, and that if we open ourselves to his grace, we can not only survive, but thrive. We can produce, as today’s gospel reminds us, the good fruits of the seed sown in us by the Lord. We can be the salt of the earth and the light of the world which he is calling us to be.

Pope Francis sums up very beautifully what it means for us, as the Church in today’s world, to be salt and light. He speaks of the world as caught up in a battle between good and evil. It is a battle in which there are many casualties – casualties of violence, of persecution, of discrimination, of abandonment – and he speaks in this context of the Church as the field hospital into which the injured are brought for treatment. And what is the treatment, the cure, which the Church is called to offer? It is the medicine which heals wounds and warms hearts. This, insists the pope, is the great witness which the Church of Jesus Christ is called to offer to the world today: a place where people can come to have their wounds healed and their hearts warmed, a place where they can be loved and learn again to love.

If this is the vocation of the whole Church it is, for that very reason, the vocation of this parish community. In fact, it always has been. The people who formed the first Catholic community here one hundred years ago might not have expressed it in quite this way, but I am sure that many of



them instinctively understood that this was their mission, just as so many more understood instinctively, and experienced in reality, that this is what belonging to the Catholic community brought to them.

Today we pray in remembrance and gratitude for all those who for the last one hundred years strived to be faithful to this ideal here in this parish. We acknowledge with admiration and with gratitude all those who work together in our own time to give expression to this ideal of faithful discipleship. And we entrust to the Lord with hope and confidence all those who will come here in the future to be a part of this ongoing story of fidelity, giving expression to the hope expressed by the Lord Jesus himself at the Last Supper: *By this will everyone know that you are my disciples; that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Our Lady of Fatima, Queen of Peace, pray for us.