



Archdiocesan Agencies Mass

Homily

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

**Wednesday 19 July 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Yesterday many of the directors and managers of our Archdiocese of Perth agencies gather together at the Newman-Siena Centre for a day of reflection and formation. The day began with a very beautiful Acknowledgement of country led by Donella Brown, the Director of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry here in the Archdiocese, and with a gentle and engaging prayer, based on the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis, prepared by Sister Kerry Willison, the Director of the Archdiocesan Centre for Liturgy.

I was then invited to set the scene by offering a brief reflection on the meaning of leadership in a Christian context, and this was followed by a much deeper presentation of this theme by Father Vincent Glynn.

Although we had prepared our material independently of each other, both Father Vincent and I spoke about Jesus as the model for all Christian leadership and service. In doing so, we also both referred to Jesus as the one who so often turns everything upside down. The very idea that one of the best and most accurate visual presentations of Christian leadership and authority is found in the image of Jesus on his hands and knees, performing the humble and even demeaning task of washing the feet of his disciples, is a perfect example of the way in which Jesus challenges our normal ways of thinking. He is, we might say, the great disruptor. And the implication of this, of course, is that as his disciples we must be prepared to be continually disrupted.

The gospel reading to which we have just listened, is yet another example of the way in which Jesus seeks to shake us out of our comfort zone so that we can begin to look at everything - our values, our attitudes, our entrenched ways of thinking and acting, the nature of our relationships, and the ways in which we conduct ourselves in the course of our work here in the Archdiocese - through the eyes of Jesus, rather than from our own, sometimes blinkered, point of view.

At first glance, today's Gospel reading might seem to be relatively simple and sweet and even, perhaps, a bit sentimental. It is one of those passages from the gospel which seem to highlight the theme of the importance of the young in God's kingdom. It is the children, according to the common understanding of today's reading, who are the privileged recipients of the message of the gospel. If we were to ask ourselves why this is the case, we would probably suggest that it is



the simplicity, the openness, and the lack of guile which we so often identify with childhood, which Jesus is praising and proposing to all of us as the attitude we should all try to bring to our understanding of the faith.

There is some truth to this, of course, but it is important for us to understand that there is nothing sentimental about what Jesus is saying. The word Jesus uses, which is translated in today's gospel as "mere children", is really better translated as "the simple ones" and his reference to God's decision to reveal the truth, not to the learned and the clever, but rather to the simple, comes immediately after some very harsh criticism by Jesus of those who, in spite of all that they had seen Jesus do, and all that they had heard Jesus say, still refused to believe in him. In this context, we might understand Jesus' reference to the learned and the clever as a reference to those who through their hardness of heart and their sense of their own importance, are in fact, blind to the reality of God present and active in the world, and in the lives of those God loves, which is to say, everybody.

Hardness of heart, intransigence and obstinacy, judgmentalism, an exaggerated sense of self-importance and entitlement, these are the things which Jesus has been calling out in the various encounters he has with people leading up to this morning's gospel passage. And they are, of course, the very opposite of the simplicity and largeness of heart to which Jesus invites his disciples. They are also the very things which compromise, and even have the potential to destroy, the mission of the Church, including the mission of our Catholic agencies here in the Archdiocese of Perth.

Today, in this annual Mass of Thanksgiving for all the good work done through our Catholic agencies, we are being given the opportunity to praise God for sending so many good people, with such large hearts, to work with us and among us. At the same time, we are also hearing an invitation from the Lord to continue to reflect on what it means to be a disciple of the one who got down on his hands and knees, to wash the feet of his disciples, and who will say in the passage, which immediately follows today's Gospel, "*learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart*".