



## **Mercedes College Opening of the Year & Commissioning Mass**

### **Homily**

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

**Tuesday 30 January, 2024  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

When our present Pope, Pope Francis, chose Saint Francis of Assisi as the man after whom he wished to be named as Pope, and on whom he wished to model his ministry as the Bishop of Rome and the successor of Saint Peter, he was really issuing an invitation to the whole Church, which of course includes the community of Mercedes College, to also look to Saint Francis for inspiration as we try to live as disciples of Jesus.

In looking to Saint Francis many people remember the story of Saint Francis praying in the ruins of the little Chapel of Saint Damien in the countryside near Assisi. It was in that chapel that Saint Francis seemed to hear the figure of Jesus on the crucifix speaking to him and saying, "*Go and rebuild my Church for it is falling into ruin*". At this time in our history, when the failings of so many members of the Church are so obvious to all, this call to rebuild the Church, so that it better reflects the mind and heart of God, makes a great deal of sense. Every Catholic school, including Mercedes College will, by its radical fidelity to its mission, contribute to this work of renewing and purifying the Church.

There is another famous story of Saint Francis, not quite as well-known, which I would like to share with you this morning, in the hope that it might offer something for you all - students, families, staff members, and school leaders - as you set out on the year that lies ahead, so full of promise and, inevitably, also of challenge.

One night Saint Francis, together with one of his companions, set out to go into the countryside near Assisi in order to find some quiet place for prayer and reflection. In doing this, Saint Francis and his companion, Brother Leo, were really following the example of Jesus who, the gospel tells us, often went into the hills at night to pray.

At a certain point, Francis told Brother Leo that he was going off on his own and that Leo was not to follow him. Leo, however, was curious and wanted to see what Francis did when he was praying on his own. He followed him and, when he found him, discovered that Francis was on his knees, saying over and over again, "*Lord who are you, and who am I?*"



It seems to me that the second part of that question - *who am I?* - is one that we all ask ourselves from time to time, and one that is particularly important for young people to ask. Although it is a long time ago, I still remember that my years in secondary school were very much marked by this question. The question included, of course, "*what do I want to do when I leave school?*" but as I look back now, I see more clearly than perhaps I did at the time that there was also a more fundamental question: *Who do I want to be? What kind of person do I want to be?*

I would imagine that the staff members of every secondary school in W.A understand that helping the young people in their school to grapple with these questions, and certainly with the first of these questions, is an essential part of the school's role. I am absolutely sure that it is an essential part of a Catholic school's role.

The thing that makes the story of Saint Francis which I have shared with you so important is that it reminds us that, within the context of a Catholic school like Mercedes College, the answer to the second part of the question – "*Lord, who am I?*" really includes the kinds of answers we give to the first part of the question – "*Lord, who are you?*". If, as we believe, we are all created in the image of God, then as we come to know God better we also come to know more clearly what we are being called to do and be.

It is obviously true that each one of us must find the answers to these fundamental questions ourselves. No one can force the answers upon us. Questions about God and about Church are challenging and perplexing and, for some, even frightening. Many people prefer to avoid them. But in spite of the challenges and difficulties, your College, together with all the other Catholic Colleges in WA, wants to help you find both the courage and the pathways to face these questions and to search, again with courage and with integrity, for some answers.

For many of you, both students and staff, this journey has already begun. Today we commission a number of young women who have already searched their hearts and recognised not only that God exists and that God matters, but that God is calling them to something special: to be Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist and to exercise the enormous privilege and responsibility of helping their fellow students to encounter the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist.

Today we commission your new principal, Dr Lucie McCrory, who has already committed herself with great faith and generosity to Catholic Education in WA, and now offers her gifts and talents to your College as your new principal. Today we remember all the Sisters of Mercy who, in many cases a long time ago and often in places far from Australia, asked the question "*Lord who are you and who am I?*" and heard the answer "*I am the one who is calling you to leave everything behind and give yourself to me and to my people*". And today we welcome and recognise so many others who, having listened for the voice of the Lord speaking to them in their hearts and in the circumstances of their lives, have responded with a generous "yes" which has led them here



today. The gift of faith-filled commitment is the very air you breathe here at Mercedes College. What a precious gift this is.

*“Lord, who are you, and who am I?”* May each one of us, in our own way and in our own time, find the courage to consider these questions with open hearts and minds. May your time at Mercedes College in 2024 provide fertile ground for this most fundamental challenge to take root and grow in your lives.