



## Chrism Mass

### Homily

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

**Tuesday 26 March, 2024  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As some of you would be aware there is an ancient Latin saying which has a place of great significance in our Catholic tradition: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. It might be translated into English something like this: as we pray, so we believe, and as we believe, so we are called to live.

While all of the three elements of the saying are profoundly interconnected, the order in which they occur is also very important. Above all the Christian community is called to be a community of prayer, a community in other words which knows, and embraces the fundamental truth that our faith, before it is about anything else, is about our relationship with God and, as a consequence of this, our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the faith. We are a people who know that, as the words of St Paul in one of his letters remind us, it is in God that “*we live, and move and have our very being*”.

I mention this at the beginning of my reflections this morning because today we celebrate one of the most important liturgical celebrations of our lives as Catholic Christians. Gathered around the bishop, who is joined by the priests and deacons of the diocese, all of you together, the holy People of God here in this part of the world celebrate who you are as brothers and sisters united in the community of faith: a living, effective sign and instrument of the ongoing and active presence of Jesus Christ in the world. The liturgy today, in a particularly powerful way, is what we might even call an epiphany: an unveiling of the mystery of the Church as it has been given to us by the Lord and perpetuated throughout history, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the faithful handing on of our tradition.

When I was studying in preparation for my own ordination as a priest, I remember being taught that if by some strange set of circumstances every theology book in the world were to be destroyed, we would still have complete access to our faith in and through our faithful celebration of the Church's liturgy. This unlikely idea helps us understand the importance of the saying, *lex orandi, lex credendi*. What we believe, what we have received from the Lord, is celebrated first in our liturgy and then comes to expression in our theology. From this we learn what the Lord is



asking of us, we learn about how we are meant to live our lives, we formulate and live out the *lex vivendi*.

At the heart of our liturgy of course is our sacramental celebration of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. This morning once again we will be invited into the mystery of the Last Supper, where the Lord gave his disciples the bread and wine which were his body and blood, broken and poured out for them and for us, and we will be challenged once again by his words, "*Do this in remembrance of me*". As I often remind myself, we are called to **celebrate** the Eucharist so that we can **become, the Eucharist**: in and through our communion with the Lord in the Eucharist, we are enabled to be the presence of the Lord in the lives of others. In memory of Jesus and in union with him we too are called to hand over our lives for the life of the world, just as he did

Surrounding our celebration of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection this morning, and almost as a commentary on it, are two other elements which are unique to today's celebration. One is the blessing and consecration of the Holy Oils and the other is the renewal of their ordination promises by our priests. The oils, of course, are used exclusively in the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick and Priestly and Episcopal Ordination. Each of these sacraments points in its own way to the mystery of the Eucharist, the great sacrament of communion. In Baptism we are plunged into the great mystery of Christ. The pouring of the water symbolises our union with Christ as He submits Himself to death, is plunged into the darkness, and then rises to new life. The oil of catechumens, which we bless today, is used in Baptism to remind us of the power and strength which comes to us from the grace of God, and the Chrism, which we consecrate today, symbolises our profound union with Christ whose death and rising to new life we now share. The oil of the sick which we also bless this morning becomes a sign of the strength we receive in times of physical illness and as we prepare for the final moment of our journey into full communion with the Lord through death and our rising to new life. And, of course, before we come to this final journey we have our lives to lead. The oil of Chrism, used at our Baptism, is used again at our Confirmation to symbolise the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes to us in a new and powerful way to strengthen us for the challenge of living our Christian lives to the full. And both at our Baptism and our Confirmation the sacred Chrism also anoints us for our share in the priesthood of Christ, just as it is also used in the ordination of priests and bishops. As Jesus offered Himself on the cross in a sacrificial act of total self-giving to His Father for our sake so we, who are one with Him, are also called to make our lives a sacrificial gift for others. This is our sharing in the priesthood of Christ. This is what makes us all, together, a holy nation and a royal priesthood.

The other unique element in our liturgy tonight is the renewing of their solemn promises by our priests, who of course were anointed at their ordination with the oil of Chrism. As ordained priests we live among our people, conscious that the Lord has placed us at the heart of our communities



not because we are better, or holier, or more worthy than our brothers and sisters, but simply because the Lord, in the mystery of his own divine plan, has chosen us to be the living signs that he has not deserted his people, that he continues to lead us and to feed us, to forgive us and to encourage us, to serve us and to strengthen us.

As priests we know that we are unworthy servants, that the invitation we give to our brothers and sisters to a life of greater fidelity is also, and often even more, an invitation to us, and that we need the example of the fidelity and faith of our communities of faith as much as they need the example of our fidelity and faith. We know, too, and accept with great trepidation and humility, that in God's plan for his Church we as priests are essential for the Church's fidelity. It is only through the empowering presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of His Church that any baptised Christian can hope to be faithful: it is our role as priests to bring alive, in a particular and sacramentally effective way, this empowering presence of the Lord. And this is why, in the official liturgy of the Church as we celebrate it this morning, the renewal of the priests' commitment to their priesthood is accompanied by an invitation to the whole community of faith, represented by all who have gathered here in the Cathedral this evening, to pray for our priests that they will be faithful to their vocation.

*Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.* As we pray today, celebrating who we are as a Church, rejoicing in the gift of the Eucharist, recommitting ourselves to being Eucharistic people, receiving with gratitude the sacramental gifts of life, strength, commitment and hope, and praying for our priests and bishops, may we believe what we celebrate in this cathedral, and live it out in our daily lives with courage, enthusiasm and joy.