



Palm Sunday (Year B)

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 24 March, 2024
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As many of you would know the Catholic Church around the world, including of course here in our archdiocese, is being invited by Pope Francis to enter into a process of renewal which might help us, as the Lord's Church, to become more fully what the Pope calls a community of missionary disciples. In issuing this invitation the Pope is really asking us to reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In particular, I think, he is reminding us that the fact that we are baptised is not just an accident of history, or merely a decision made for us by our parents. We were baptized because, in the Lord's mysterious plan for the salvation of His people, He wanted us to be among those upon whom He would rely to make Him known to others. What Jesus said to His disciples on the night of the Last Supper, therefore, He also says to us: You did not choose me; no I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and then you will be my disciples.

In reminding us of this Pope Francis is further developing a thought expressed by Pope Saint John Paul 11 over twenty years ago: namely that as Christians we are called to witness to Christ - to unveil, as Pope John Paul put it, the face of Christ to others.

There is nothing new in this of course. It has always been true that as Christians we are called to reflect the face of Christ to all those we meet – and to do this by witnessing - by the way we speak and act – to the love, compassion and mercy of Christ who is our Way, our Truth and our life.

The particular contribution which Pope John Paul made to this basic truth of our faith, and which Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis also insist on, is this: that, in the words of Pope John Paul, "our witness will be hopelessly inadequate if we have not first contemplated the face of Christ".

This is a very striking expression. The Pope doesn't say that our witness will be incomplete, or less than perfect, or a bit unsatisfactory, if we have not first contemplated the face of Christ. He says that it will be hopelessly inadequate.

This takes us to the very heart of our faith. We Catholics believe, and indeed know with the certainty of our faith, that in Jesus we have so much more than a really good man who lived a wonderful life and left us a remarkable legacy and a powerful teaching. He is all that of course but, much more importantly and essentially, we know that Jesus is the revelation of God. He is God with a human face. And because of that, and because He has risen from the dead, He is not just a great man from the past. He is a living



presence today filling our lives with His love. As we contemplate His face, as we gaze on Him in the gospels, we are seeing into the very heart and mind of God Himself.

Today then, as we celebrate Palm Sunday and begin Holy Week, that final week in which we remember the last days of Jesus' life and look forward to the joy of Easter, we are invited to look carefully, to gaze intently, on the face of Jesus.

We watch as He enters into Jerusalem, receiving the enthusiastic welcome of the crowds but knowing, at the same time, that they will turn against Him and that His entry into Jerusalem is in fact His entry into death.

We watch as He sits at the table and shares a last meal with His disciples, giving them the bread and wine which are His body and blood broken and spilt for them and for us.

We watch as He travels that terrible journey from the room of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane and eventually to the hill of Calvary where what happened at the table in symbol will happen in reality: His body will be broken on the cross and His blood will be poured out in death.

And what do we see as we watch Jesus in these last days? We see a man who is determined to give everything, who is prepared to hold nothing back, who is ready to suffer humiliation, and hatred, and ridicule and, finally, who is prepared to die, because of love. There are many explanations for Jesus' death – the jealousy and fear of some of the Jewish leaders, the betrayal of Judas, the cruelty and blood-lust of the Roman army, the cowardice of Pontius Pilate – but in the end there is only one explanation. Jesus gave His life for us because He loved us so much that He would not stop proclaiming the truth about who God really is, even though He knew it would cost Him His life.

As we look on the face of Jesus in Holy Week and see there nothing but love, we know that we are seeing directly into the mind and heart of God Himself. No failure, no mistake, no weakness or betrayal on our part can destroy God's love for us. In giving us Jesus, who offers His life for us, God gives everything to us and for us.

The question is: what are we prepared to give in return?