



**24th Sunday Ordinary Time
Child Protection Week Sunday**

Homily

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

**Saturday 13 September 2020
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

The vast majority of us who have gathered here in the Cathedral this morning for today's celebration of the Eucharist are Australians, and Western Australians, and Western Australian Catholics. We are part of the Church and part of our society. All of us, I am sure, are struggling in varying ways to cope with the challenges which the COVID-19 pandemic continues to put before us. While we are not in the same desperate position as our brothers and sisters in Victoria, for example, it is nevertheless the case that the restrictions under which we must operate in our daily lives in order to limit the transmission of this terrible disease are difficult and distressing and for many disruptive and unsettling as they face an uncertain future.

The fact that here in Western Australia we are able to gather relatively freely for our weekly celebration of Mass is a great blessing. At a time like this we can draw hope and strength from the encouragement and support of our brothers and sisters in the faith and most fundamentally, of course, from our deepening engagement with and encounter with the Lord who is always with us in times of stress and difficulty and challenge. Today, as every day, we can entrust ourselves to the Lord with hope and with confidence knowing that he has promised to be with us, especially when two or more gather in his name, as we do this morning.

Among the many consequences of the pandemic is the decision taken by the bishops of Australia to postpone the Plenary Council assemblies. The first of the two formal assemblies of the Plenary Council was scheduled to begin in October but because of the pandemic it has been postponed for twelve months. Difficult though this is, especially given the time, effort and commitment so many people have put in to preparing for the Council, even this decision might be seen as a response to God's providence. We now have more time to enter more deeply into the fundamental question of the Plenary Council: *what do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

All members of the Church, including the bishops of Australia, are trying to listen to each other in the belief that through that listening, and through deep reflection on what we are hearing, we might indeed catch the voice of the Holy Spirit leading us into the future for the Church here in our land, the future God desires for us.



One of the most persistent themes to emerge in all the consultations conducted so far, and there have been many of them, is the need - the urgent need - for the whole Church to respond to the terrible scourge of the sexual abuse of the young in our Catholic community over many years.

The Plenary Council will certainly engage with this vital matter but, of course, we cannot wait for 2021 to respond. Indeed, the whole Church, including our own Catholic community here in the Archdiocese of Perth, has been responding for a long time now. We still have a long way to go. I personally am deeply convinced that this will remain the major priority for me in my remaining time as the Archbishop of Perth as it has been in the eight and a half years in which I have held this position so far.

Today's Mass here in the Cathedral is being celebrated, on what we are calling Safeguarding Sunday, as a sign of the commitment of the whole Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Perth to the safety and well-being of our children and young people. Even more importantly our Mass this morning is an expression of our belief that it is only with the help of God's grace and God's Holy Spirit that we can continue to respond with courage, compassion and determination to this terrible part of the story of our Church. The survivors of sexual abuse and their families and friends, the Catholic community as a whole and our society deserves nothing less and demands nothing less from us. I believe that we can truly say that God expects this from us.

At the heart of our response here in the Archdiocese of Perth is our Safeguarding Project. Throughout the whole of the Archdiocese we have what I might call an army of generous, committed and dedicated people who work as Safeguarding Officers in our local parishes. Many of them have been able to join us for Mass this morning and I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their generosity and commitment, to express my gratitude and my admiration for them, and to ask all of you to continue to pray for them, for the parish communities they serve, and most of all for survivors of sexual abuse, for their families and friends, and for all those in our Archdiocese who in various ways, often hidden, are working to make our present and our future so very different from the shame of our past.

Today's second reading reminds us that as Christians we live for the Lord. This is a lovely phrase but it is ultimately meaningless unless it is translated into action. One of the reasons why so many people suffered in our communities of faith through the actions of some of our clergy, religious and laity is precisely because so many of us, perhaps, really only pay lip service to our faith but do not live each day as a gift given to the Lord. This gift is given to the Lord by being given to the Lord's people, the ones the Lord loves. And as the gospel reminds us on a number of occasions Jesus had a special love and concern for the young.

While in this Archdiocese we look to the director of our Safeguarding Office, Andrea Musulin, and to her wonderful team for leadership and guidance in the area of safeguarding, and while we look also to the Safeguarding Officers who undertake such an important work in our local parishes, I would like to once again ask every single member of the Archdiocese of Perth to commit him or herself - for you all here in the Cathedral today to commit yourselves - to the care, protection and well-being of our children and our young people. While the bishops, priests, deacons and religious have a particular responsibility of leadership in our community, this responsibility is shared more widely among our Catholic people in our



parishes, schools, hospitals, health and social outreach agencies and other organisations. The truth is that we are all brothers and sisters in the faith, all gathered together by the Spirit of the Lord and all commissioned to be, together, a living and powerful sign of the presence of Jesus still among us today as our saviour, our protector and our healer. Every single one of us, without exception, is called to live our lives for the Lord, and to live our lives in generous service of our brothers and sisters. It is my earnest prayer and hope, one which I believe the vast majority of Catholics shares with me, that no child or young person will ever again experience the horror of sexual abuse in one of our communities, and that we never again have to hang our heads in shame because of our dreadful failure to be what the Lord is calling us to be.

Please join with me in praying for this special grace today.