



**Project Compassion Sunday (5th Sunday of Ordinary Time)
Homily**

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton
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St Mary's Cathedral
Sunday, 7 February 2016

Just over 20 years after the close of World War II, the Second Vatican Council closed with the publication of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This document has become recognised as one of the great achievements of the Council and it has perpetuated the spirit in which Pope John XXIII called together the bishops from around the world to meet in council with him.

The central theme of the Pastoral Constitution is that the church must seek to walk in solidarity with all of humanity, especially when people in every nation turn their attention to the challenges that face them nationally and internationally. The intention of the Council Fathers gathered around the Pope was to have the church offer its unique service to the whole human family. The church was inspired by the Holy Spirit at the Council to recover the vision that it is part of the story of humanity, and sees itself as the community of disciples of the Lord, as well as brothers and sisters in the human family. This accounts for the sense the church has of solidarity, respect and love for every person.

The eyes of the world were on the things that were coming out from the Council. One of those things was the call from the Pastoral Constitution for the dioceses all over the world, and particularly in the wealthier parts of the world, to fix their eyes on the poor. A beautiful passage in the document came to everyone's attention. It ran: 'It is as if Christ himself were appealing to the charity of his followers through the mouths of these poor people'.

A little later in the same article, it called for systematic appeals and distribution of aid in dioceses and nations, and for the creation of partnerships with other bodies engaged in similar fund raising.

This call was noticed in Australia. Even before the Pastoral Constitution was published, a Catholic Overseas Relief Committee had been formed, which coordinated the first national appeal in Lent 1965. In the following year, 1966, the first Project Compassion appeal was launched. This year we are following this wonderful tradition, 50 years on.

In 1966, Project Compassion raised nationally \$116,000. Last year, Catholics around the country raised the record of \$11.5 million.

The opportunity is given to us in Lent to incorporate Project Compassion once more into our journey to and with Jesus.



Lent begins this Wednesday with the distribution of ashes. The focus is on using this time to reflect on how we are walking with Christ. Our reflection is meant to be hopeful because we are aware of being called to trust in the love and mercy of God. He encourages us to look deeply into our hearts without fear, for what we discover there are achievements of grace as we see growth in faith and our relationship with Jesus, as well as seeing the further work that needs to be done to make Christ the centre of our lives. The time of Lent is sacred and a blessing for us.

The gospel for today brings to our attention how Peter received his invitation to walk with Jesus as a disciple. I noticed that Jesus ventured into Peter's world, the world of the fishermen. Their meeting was to break so many of the understandings the Jews had of God's way of relating to them. Jesus, the man and the Son of God, chose to go into Peter's world. He calls Peter to come with him and to be no longer a fisher of fish, but be formed to be a fisher of men and women.

Jesus catches Peter's attention by telling him to cast his net in a special place in the lake. The miraculous catch results. Jesus, in Peter's eyes, is a master fisherman and believes that he can learn from him. Peter can now be called to his greater vocation to become a teacher of the faith in Christ to the nations.

Peter would not have failed to see another significant aspect to the meeting on the shore of the lake. Wide, deep lakes and the sea itself were thought of as the home of Satan and his spirits of evil. The unpredictable and savage sea was a place of great danger. It was the place of death. We say in the Creed that Jesus descended into hell following his death and resurrection. The translation for hell in this sense is 'the inferior waters' that have overcome people. The event of Jesus being raised to life, the resurrection, allows the Son of God to fish out the people who have been overcome by the inferior, flooding waters of the world's cares. He has the power to save and to provide us in the church with the courage and generosity to engage in the work of salvation and liberation of our brothers and sisters.

The gospel of Peter's call brings out another aspect of the journey of Lent ahead of us and of Project Compassion. Once Peter and his companions came ashore, we are told they left their boats and nets, and began to follow Jesus. It would be a necessary journey. They needed the time to learn who Christ was, what the Word of Christ was and how they needed to change in order to be true witnesses to Christ. Peter would become a wonderful teacher of God's love and mercy as he stood in solidarity with people of all backgrounds, showing respect and love. His example persists to this day in the community of Christ's disciples.

Project Compassion has been the way that we can make a difference in the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. This year, the emphasis in the message of the appeal is how we can make a deeper difference for people by giving them the opportunities to learn in the areas that will change the lives of their own people. You will hear or read the stories, week by week, of some people overseas and at home, who have been able to participate in educational programs and who have been agents for change in the midst of great poverty and injustice. So the theme of Project Compassion this year, 'Learning more, Creating change' will remind us of the work we do can with Christ to bring the poor to see hope, and feel the liberation from the evil of exploitation and indifference.



I pray with you all that we take up the Project Compassion appeal and make it a daily part of our journey with Jesus to a glorious Easter. I am truly thankful for the way our sacrifices, that have been joined to the appeals in previous years, have been so effective in lifting people out of hopelessness and making lives worth living. In responding to the call of Christ from the mouths of the poor, may the Lord bless us with renewed faith at Easter.