



**Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)
Homily**

**By the Most Rev Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Francis Assisi Church, East Cannington
Sunday, 19 February 2017

Over the last 12 months, I have been following with interest the planning that has brought us to this significant moment for the parish of East Cannington. I am very aware that there are many emotions which we bring to the celebration of the Mass today. It is with this Mass, that St Francis of Assisi Church will be closed. So the predominate feeling of most will be that of sadness.

I have fond memories of coming to the parish on many occasions when I was Secretary to Archbishop Goody and then to Archbishop Foley. They are good memories. They are of the celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Did you know that Archbishop Goody had a nickname for East Cannington? He would sometimes refer to this area as 'Frogville'. The older parishioners will remember that each winter, large areas of East Cannington would go under water and the night stillness would be filled with the sound of croaking frogs.

Each of us carries special memories with us to this Mass. The church building will always represent the Catholic community that gathered here to celebrate the very significant stages in the lives of ourselves and our loved ones.

There have been the baptisms and confirmations, perhaps the weddings, and certainly the funeral Masses and liturgies. All of these are etched into our memories. The building was the place for these memories to be born and for this we will be eternally grateful.

A community of Catholics created a spiritual home here where they had their faith nourished. That wonderful faith was their cornerstone and foundation for their journey through life. Yes, this place will always have a special place in the hearts of those families.

As time has gone by, the community has changed. So many have completed their journey through this life. So many have moved away to other places to establish their new lives and homes.

St Francis of Assisi church itself has weathered so many years of use, and requires attention if it is to be ever used again. For this reason, we are celebrating the Mass in the hall. On the last few Sundays, we have been listening to the Gospel in which Matthew presents the Sermon on the Mount. It begins by Jesus gathering the disciples for him to teach them about



the way for us to live in the Kingdom of God, even now and not just from the time we complete our earthly journey.

Jesus gathered the disciples on a number of occasions, in various situations and places. The places were important but not as important as the people themselves or the reason for the gathering of them. Jesus brings us together to nourish us with his word. This word has the power to strengthen and lift us up. It will always be challenging and sometimes work in us to prune us so that new growth can be possible.

The Sermon on the Mount is particularly challenging. The teaching of Jesus has the authority behind it that none other possesses. It is intended to make of us the new wine skins that can take the new wine of his teaching and the Way to becoming Christian.

What we have heard today is how we can become nonviolent, loving and forgiving. The key Words of Life were: Turn the other cheek; If someone takes you to law and wants your tunic, give them your cloak as well; If someone asks you to go one mile, go two miles; Give to anyone who asks; Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

None of these responses to the actions of others towards us is easy or even possible in every situation. Why does Jesus insist that we take on these attitudes? How can he expect us to do these things? Are they the hurdles that are just too high for us pass over?

Jesus gives us the answer, according to Matthew. To receive the answer, we need to follow the story of Jesus through that gospel until we reach the account of his passion, death and resurrection. It is in this climax of his life that we discover that Jesus alone possesses the spirit that makes him able to perfectly fulfil the law of God. In other words, the ways of God are best demonstrated in the life of Jesus. What we consider impossible, he has been able to do. But of course this is all very well for Jesus. What about us?

The Gospel takes our apprehension away: the spirit that was at work in Jesus has been passed on to us.

When we find ourselves responding without violence, showing care for others simply because we have a love for them, being surprised when we find the strength and courage to ask forgiveness and to offer forgiveness, these experiences demonstrate that the spirit has been passed to us and that we have allowed the Spirit to have his way in us. We will certainly experience what living in the kingdom means here and now, as well in heaven.

Our gathering today is important because we are the people of God, the Church. The words of the Gospel are important. We have been gathered in this place so that we may drink in the Words of Life. The conversion and transformation these words cause in our lives is important. Most important!

Let us recall the words in Leviticus that whether we are the offended party or the offender, we are obliged to look for ways to resolve the situation. We cannot control the response from others, but we can make our own choices as to how we are to deal with difficult situations in life and move forward with a peaceful spirit.



St Paul would say that evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in any Christian community is that it shows a spirit of creative unity, confirming truth and ministry for the needs of the others. Let us recall the words of Pope Francis in his letter, *The Joy of the Gospel*, when he reflected on the Law of Love: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

He wrote: 'Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of Love who saves us, to see God in others, and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others.'

In the Year of Mercy, he wrote: 'I wish to say to you: Joy! Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but of having encountered a person: Jesus in our midst.'

We are called personally to work with the spirit that we have received from Jesus. This is an urgent call for each of our communities as well: may the Spirit be allowed to work and let the Spirit be unencumbered by us. May we have the courage to let the Spirit guide us in new paths. Let us pray that each of us will be an image of Jesus for others.