



Newman College Bicentenary of Marist Education Homily

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

Newman Catholic College, Churchlands
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Tonight we are creating a new tradition here by having this Mass and gathering the entire school and the families together. So it is a great way for us to pray for and support the students who will receive badges that indicate the special roles of leadership they will exercise for this community over this year. And I'm very pleased that I'm able to be here with you, to celebrate this Mass with you, and to be part of this special celebration.

As we were waiting, I was talking with Father John Jegorow, who just read the Gospel for us. You know that almost 60 years ago, he was one of the foundation students of the College on this campus. He pointed out for me the original block of classrooms.

Much has happened since those days: the College has grown and has become even more beautiful. He was saying that where we're seated here, celebrating Mass, was still all bush, so it was still very much on the edge of the metropolitan area in those days, and it was a very special place. He was a very proud foundation student at the College, and he's very happy to be here with us this evening.

About the same time, I was one of the first students to go to what was the Christian Brothers' school in Bedford, which is now Chisholm, and I know that Chisholm is a very favourite competitor with you! I think you have eclipsed Chisholm for the number of students now and Newman College is our largest school in the Archdiocese. Those two great schools are an important part of our Catholic education system and we're very proud of what they've been able to achieve over these years and what they will achieve into the future because of the dedication of the families, the students and staff. We are proud of the way that the young people here dedicate themselves to their studies and to other activities of the school. So we look forward to great things this year. The College will be greatly assisted by these young people who will assume these roles of leadership in the community.

Leadership in the Church is of course a very up and down sort of thing, and it goes right back to the days when Jesus first started the whole church going, with those first disciples. We heard this evening about the first among those disciples, Peter, for today is a feast day of Peter. So that is why we're focusing on him, and it's very appropriate I think that we're able to do so, especially when we're thinking about leadership in our community. Peter wasn't a great success in many ways as a leader, but in other ways he certainly became a success.

We know a lot about Peter, as we know a lot about Paul, because they have become so important to us as we look back into the history of the Church, and we look back at how God, how Jesus particularly, chose them for a special work within that early Church.



There's a wonderful story about the time when Peter was in Rome, and he and the early Christians were facing a terrible persecution, and he made a very wise decision, he thought, to leave Rome. And there's a story about how he was leaving the city to escape this persecution, and some words of Jesus came to him. It seemed as if Jesus was standing in front of him and speaking to him, reminding him of another time when Peter turned his back on Jesus and his work, the time just before Jesus was crucified. Peter denied Jesus three times, denied three times that he had even known Jesus. And Peter reflected on that, I'm sure, and the words of Jesus, stopped him in his tracks.

The question came to him: where are you going? And he knew in his heart that he had to turn back, which he did. I think that was one of the successes of the leadership of Peter that we cherish. He had received, at that moment, the courage that enabled him to turn back and to face his own death. And it was in his dying for his own faith that he gave the most eloquent of witnesses to his faith, to what he believed and to everything he may have said. He had shown courageous leadership.

You know, you'd be absolutely insane to die for something that wasn't true. You'd be mad to give up your life for something that wasn't true. But you need courage to give everything of yourself to what you believe, and the courage that was lacking he received from Jesus: he turned back and he witnessed to his faith by allowing himself to be taken. Peter gave his life for his faith, he became a martyr for the truth.

The key quality of his leadership was humility. He knew that he needed others in his life, especially Jesus.

His humility helped him to acknowledge that he needed the strong spirit of Jesus to give him the courage to do what was the right thing to do. Because here we are, all these hundreds of years later, celebrating his life and his witness, and saying to the Lord, give us the courage to be as strong in our faith. Give us the courage and the strength to lead others in this faith, especially by serving, by adopting that role of the servant. Courage and generosity will allow us to see the needs of the others and make us able to respond to their needs with great love and care through our service.

So tonight we remember Peter, we remember that leadership, that lesson about leadership that he has given. We pray for humility and that spirit of service that should be a hallmark of all Christian leaders. We pray particularly for the young College leaders tonight, who will receive these badges and accept these various offices of leadership. We pray that they will have the humility, the ability to ask for that strength they need to fulfil their tasks as leaders from Jesus, to receive that spirit that will give them courage and strength, gentleness and compassion. We pray that this year will be a year of great blessing because of their leadership within this great community.