



**Opening Mass
2017 Catholic Schools Performing Arts Festival
Homily**

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

Infant Jesus Catholic Church, Morley
Friday 21 July, 2017

I am fascinated by the stories I have heard from some of the refugees who have been welcomed to Australia. They are spellbinding, and I leave each encounter wondering how I would have coped in the dreadful situations so many have lived through as they fled their homelands.

When I was Parish Priest at Mirrabooka, I had the chance to listen to many of these stories. Some were told by the assistant priests, two of whom were refugees, who ministered with me.

We have come to know Anh Do, himself a refugee, through his participation in programs on television. He is now quite famous in this country as a comedian, actor, writer and portrait painter. In recent times we have seen him paint portraits on his TV program, Brush with Fame. He paints while having a conversation with a well know personality and at the end of the program he reveals the portrait to his guest. The guest is amazed to see how well he has captured something of their likeness and character, but also something much deeper within them. He has an eye for the inner depths of his guest. Anh seems to be able to look deep into their souls.

Anh completed his secondary education at St Aloysius College in North Sydney and went to university to study law. When he was aged three, his family escaped from Vietnam in a small boat and remarkably they survived two attacks by pirates. The motors of the boat were taken by the pirates and they were left to their fate of drifting on the sea with little hope, until they were mercifully rescued by a German ship. These experiences seemed to reinforce the family's belief in God and his presence in their moment of fear and desperation.

I think Anh's insight into the lives of others comes from his own self-discovery. He has perception because he has made his own journey within himself first. His inner life leads him to understand the people he meets.

When we learn to express ourselves in language, spoken in words, or in the language of dance and acting, we are increasing in our knowledge of ourselves. Sometimes we can be amazed at what we learn about ourselves. This learning is very precious. It often equips us with a knowledge that enables us to look into the heart of others with new understanding. Going about learning and mastering new things will reveal what perhaps has been hidden in us. In the area of the performing arts our learning can engage our minds and hearts. New ways of expressing ourselves from the heart are offered.



The Annual Performing Arts Festival in which so many of the students of our Catholic schools and colleges participate is a great blessing for the new learning and the wonderful outcomes it makes possible for us.

Any learning begins from an awareness that there is something more for us to know. St Paul wrote how he saw himself being like a simple vessel, an earthenware jar. What he had come to know was that even in the humblest person, a beautiful treasure can be discovered. Of course, to begin looking within ourselves can take great courage. There will be many good things that we will discover and we need to be grateful for these. But we know that there will be other things which we may be less comfortable in learning. There may be feelings and moods that at first surprise or confuse us. Yet, St Paul seems to be saying that these are part of being the earthen vessel: that in the midst of all the questioning, doubting and confusion we will discover that Jesus is present. Jesus is the treasure of great price and that it is within our inner life we will certainly find him.

I pray today with you all. The Festival is a wonderful event in the life of our schools and colleges. Let us pray that it will be a blessing for each participant and that it may help us to know the beauty of God and his closeness to us.