



**Third Sunday of Lent
Centenary of the birth of Chiara Lubich**

Homily

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

St Mary's Cathedral
Sunday 15 March 2020

The presence among us this afternoon of the members of the Focolare Movement is very welcome. Earlier this year, we remembered the birth of the founder, Silvia Lubich, 100 years ago. She was born in the same year as Pope John Paul II. Yesterday was the anniversary of her death in 2008.

It was following a pilgrimage to Loreto, to the house of the Blessed Virgin that Silvia adopted the name Chiara and from that time onwards that was the name by which she has been affectionately known.

The Focolare Movement was an idea inspired in her to create a new type of community for the Church. It was to be a community of people, laity and consecrated, who would live in total commitment to God in their various vocations. The idea was very appealing, if only for the reason that the word Focolare comes from the Italian word for the hearth, where a family gathers and the bonds of relationships are deepened.

The vision of Focolare is appealing for the way that its members are committed to reaching out to others and engage with them. The image of a family gathered around the hearth in the centre of their home is one of a unity that is possible between people. As a family values conversation and the sharing of hearts, so this engagement of the brothers and sisters of Focolare in a common life, where understanding of each occurs and trust grows, the formation of the human spirit takes place. With this new spirit, the people of Focolare are ready to reach out to promote unity and fraternity in the world.

Chiara was astounded by the way Focolare grew in her life time. In a speech she gave in 1977, she said: A pen never knows what it will write, a brush never knows what it will paint and a chisel never knows what it will sculpt. When God takes someone into his hands in order to accomplish a new work in his Church, the person does not know what she will do. I think this might be my case: I'm only the instrument.



Chiara personally reached out with the message of peace and unity to the other Christian Churches, to the great religions of the world and to civic leaders. The spirit of Focolare, as we have experienced it in this Archdiocese, has meant that its members have been engaged in supporting and building relationships with all Christians through the WA Council of Churches and in being present at so many initiatives of combined religious and civic leaders.

The enduring message and living of peace and unity must be a feature of the Christian faith. The meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman has put this action front and centre.

Jesus waited for the woman at the well. His purpose was to offer her the way to true faith. She was carrying not just a water jug but the heavier burden of a lifetime of devastating choices. The first of her problems was the sense of division between her and Jews like Jesus, and as it turned out, between her and her own people. The Jew that she met that day was different. His stance and message were confronting in the most positive of ways.

Jesus was not interested in religious divides and barriers that destroy. By asking for a drink of water, he showed that barriers have to be dismantled. The faith that he offered was everyone is to be recognised as a brother or sister, and that dialogue has the greatest value. It was through the dialogue that passed between them, that the woman came to recognise Jesus, a prophet and the divine Messiah.

When the disciples return, they find things have changed for good. But they are not sure of all this. The Samaritans have always been suspect and the Jews had clear boundaries around their interaction with them.

The way of dialogue with the aim of establishing peace and unity is the way of Jesus. The fruit of his engagement with one woman, brought many other Samaritans to faith in Jesus. This was pointed out to the disciples and it was to be one of the lessons that they learnt from their Master.

As we approach the midpoint of Lent, our reflections on our faith are reaching an important point. Our path to the celebration of the Resurrection at Easter is gathering pace. At the Easter Vigil and on the Sunday, we will make a declaration renewing our faith in Jesus and his way. We are called to reflect on how we are committed to God? Do we trust him when he calls us to live with faith authentically? Do we allow new barriers to grow between us?

Do we believe in dialogue and the sharing of hearts and do we believe in and act to achieve peace and unity?

God can take each of us, like a pen or brush or chisel, and with the weak instruments that we are, he can do the most astonishing work.