



Catechist Service Commissioning Mass

Homily

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

**St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Thursday 26 October, 2023**

Like many of the older people here this evening, I had the good fortune to have had the very early years of my formation in the faith provided at a parish school. My first teacher was Sister Lelia. She was a quiet Irish Sister and, as I was to discover many years later, a woman of deep faith and trust in God.

I was visiting the aged care for religious that was functioning at St John of God, Subiaco at the time, and I especially wanted to visit Sister. She was very old but was still able to move about the facility. As she was not in her room, I went looking for her and found her in the chapel. I was surprised to see her on the floor and feared that she had fallen. But then I realised that she had prostrated herself on the floor to pray. She was alone with her Lord in deep prayer. It took her a while to sense that I was there, and she got to her feet.

Looking back, I can appreciate her spiritual depth and wonder if she had reached that sublime level of prayer, we call the prayer of union.

My reflection on the teaching of the Gospel story of the vine and the branches led me to that memory of my first teacher. She was indeed a catechist as she reinforced her teaching with experiences, and this last experience I had with her, I will treasure. This Gospel is telling us that Jesus is inviting us to a deep union with Him and to know that constant sense of His presence with us.

Jesus is the vine and we, the New People of God, are the branches that can be fruitful because we become close to Him. Becoming close to Him will mean we become more like Him and be comfortable with Him. When we draw close to Jesus, we come to know we are loved and become comfortable with God. Then the fruit appears in us: Love for God and one another.

Prayer is the means of us growing close to God.

There is, in my opinion, no greater lesson for the catechist to teach and pass on to children, and to anyone at any stage of their lives, than to pray. What I mean is that the catechist needs to



demonstrate how to pray. There is a great difference between how to pray and what to pray. But we can have difficulties when it comes to teaching about praying. We can feel that our way of praying is not sophisticated enough, or we are afraid to get too close to God anyway for what I may come to know about God and myself, or I still see God as being remote who I fear like some demanding and implacable parent.

Jesus invites us to listen to Him: to listen to His words and the experiences that He provided in the Gospel about His Father. They are constantly about love, compassion, ready forgiveness, abundant blessings of new strength and understanding for us.

Each of us must get over fears we have about drawing near to God. Let's remember God has already drawn near to us. God is already there next to us. I read recently about the coexistence of the eternity of God and of the time of human history. And I remember, as well, the words of Pope Francis when he spoke to the young people at World Youth Day in Lisbon in August.

Looking out over 1.5 million young people, he addressed these words of encouragement: *"Jesus says, 'Have no fear; Do not be afraid'. Jesus is also looking into the eyes of each of you. He knows each of your hearts, each of your lives; he knows your joys, your sorrows, your successes and failings. He knows your heart. He says, 'Have no fear; take heart; do not be afraid'"*.

So, with this encouragement, let us all move closer to our Lord, moving from fear to trust. The closest disciples who traveled with Jesus observed that He would very often leave the house where they were staying early in the morning and go to a lonely place. This He would do so that He could be with His Father in a more intimate way, without distraction, perfectly in communion. They noticed that when Jesus rejoined them the tiredness had lifted and Jesus had new energy for the day ahead, to serve with love.

This is why the disciples asked Jesus: Teach us to pray. His response was to teach them the Lord's Prayer. He taught them words but, more importantly, He taught them how to pray.

This celebration of the Commissioning of Catechists for children, people with disabilities and adults who are entering the Catechumenate is, I believe, the occasion for us to make that special commitment to prepare ourselves to pass on formation in how to pray. It is after all the relationship with God that is the foundation for our growing in faith and trust.