



## Homily – Rite of Election

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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When I was a young man in my final years of training for the priesthood, there was a very popular hymn written by an Australian composer, Kevin Bates. We will, in fact, be using one of his other hymns during tonight's liturgy. The hymn was called *A Journey Remembered* and it was often sung at ordinations or at the ceremonies of final, life-long commitment of young men and women who were becoming nuns or brothers.

Basically, it is a hymn which celebrates, with gratitude, all those events, and especially all those people, who have been part of the life-story of someone who has been led by God to a moment of decision in his or her life. Especially, it is a recognition that God has been working, often quietly and in a sense unrecognised, leading a person to a point where he or she can hear God's invitation, welcome it with joy and respond to it with courage. Each one of you who is here tonight for this Rite of Election is in exactly this position. God has been speaking to you, probably quietly and gently but with persistence, calling you to let go of your fears and your doubts and take the step of committing yourselves to Him in his Church.

It is for this reason that the words of tonight's first reading will certainly strike a chord in your hearts: do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine. Tonight, I want to encourage you to really believe that these words are being spoken to you, very personally and very directly, by the Lord. It is true that you are here because you have had the courage to step forward, to take the steps which have brought you here this evening, to make the decisions that had to be made. But, in the end, you are here tonight, not so much because of what you have done or what others have done for you, important though all of that is: you are here because of what God has done, and is still doing, in you and for you. When Jesus gathered with His disciples for the last time, just before His betrayal by Judas, He said to them something which He also says to you this evening: you did not choose me; no, I chose you, and I commission you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

There are three verses in the hymn I mentioned at the beginning of this homily. Each of them has something to say to us all this evening.

In the first verse, the hymn speaks to God who, the words say, *"carried me within your arms whenever I've known fear. You waited patiently for me, and stayed beside me even when I didn't know, or even want to know, that you are my home and my joy"*. The gift of God's love is always with us, even when we don't know how to recognise it, and even when we are too frightened to open ourselves to it. Love, especially when it is absolutely unconditional, as God's love always is, can sometimes be frightening. It calls to our best selves, our deepest selves, and urges us to let go of all that is unworthy of us - but this can be hard, and demanding, and we sometimes don't want to make the effort. But God's patient love never gives up. God knows when the time is right. God gently prepares us for His call - and then



He speaks, in one way or another, to our hearts. He has spoken to you - and you have said "yes, here I am".

The second verse of the hymn speaks of God touching our doubt with hope, setting us free from our fears and our hopelessness, and once again planting deep within us the realisation that He is our home and our joy. The faith to which we commit ourselves is not one that promises us freedom from difficulty, from challenge, from suffering. It is a faith that promises us that the God who has made Himself known in Jesus will walk with us in our moments of darkness as surely as He will in our moments of tranquility and peace. When He says to us, "Do not be afraid for I am with you", He means it.

The last verse of the hymn is a song of thanksgiving for all the ways in which God has walked with us throughout our life. It gives thanks for our family, our home, and especially the goodness of those who, in their love for us, have given us a glimpse of what it means to say that God loves us. It is a profound conviction of our Catholic tradition that God calls us to find our way to Him as a community. To become a Catholic, or to live more fully as a Catholic, is to commit ourselves, not only to God but also to each other as brothers and sisters who travel the journey of faith together. Each one of you already knows what it means to belong to another - to your husband or wife, to your children or your parents, to your brothers and sisters, to your deeply loved ones. Through this belonging, God has been teaching you what it means to love and to be loved. Now He invites you into the life of His Church and asks you to let yourselves be loved by your brothers and sisters in the faith, and to love them.

Between each verse of the hymn, of course, there is a chorus. The words are simple: "*O praise the Lord my soul - My God how great you are.*" As you step forward in a few moments to be formally acknowledged, and chosen – elected, as the Rite describes it - I hope your own heart and soul are singing this refrain. O Lord how great you are - you have called me by my name - I do not need to be afraid any more - you have chosen me.

So, come forward with hope; come forward with joy; come forward with confidence; and come forward with hearts full of gratitude. The Lord has chosen you - now choose Him within the community of His Church, where He awaits you, and where He promises you companions on your journey, food for your strengthening, the wisdom of His Spirit to guide you, the prayers of His mother to accompany you, forgiveness and healing to comfort you, and the serenity and peace you seek, which can only be found in Him.