



**Mass for Retired Priests
Homily**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

Pastoral Centre, Highgate
Tuesday, 29 November 2016

As we gather together this morning to celebrate the Eucharist, we do so right at the beginning of Advent. It is a time of waiting, of expectation and of hope. It is a time for reminding ourselves that while we are called to be men of faith, as yesterday's gospel reminded us, we are also called to be men of hope - and men who can be signs and bearers of hope for others.

Last Sunday, in many of our parish churches, the first Advent candle was lit and of course, over the following Sundays, the others will be lit as well. Although we don't notice it in the daytime, in a darkened church one candle will certainly become a focal point as light begins to spread, but once you have lit all four candles the light will really begin to dispel the darkness. It occurred to me as I was thinking about today's Mass that the Advent wreath is not a bad symbol of our priesthood. We were ordained to be like candles burning in people's lives, dispelling the darkness, providing comfort and hope, and helping people to find their way to the Lord. As we celebrate this Mass today I want to invite you to remember all the ways in which you have been bringers of light into the lives of the people you have served and loved. You have allowed God to work in you and through you and like Jesus in today's gospel you too should be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, not embarrassed to recognise what God has done and continues to do for his people through you. At the same time you, we, must be ready and eager to bless our Heavenly Father for it is all God's doing. As Jesus reminds us on another occasion, when we reflect on our lives and rejoice in all that we have achieved we should simply say, *"We are unworthy servants - we have only done our duty"*.

Your presence here today speaks very powerfully of your fidelity to the vocation you were given so long ago. One of the reasons I wanted to have this Mass, which I hope we will celebrate each year, is because fidelity is worth celebrating. It deserves recognition and gratitude. And so, on behalf of the people of God in this archdiocese, and on my own behalf, I want to say "thank you". The Church in our archdiocese has been richly blessed, and continues to be so, by your generosity, your courage and your faith.

We know of course that for each one of us this fidelity has been diminished by moments of infidelity. We have not always been, and perhaps still are not always, the living images of the presence of the Good Shepherd among his people that we are called to be. Like Peter we will have had cause from time to time to weep bitterly because of our betrayals. Like him we will have had times when we felt the only thing we could say to the Lord was *"Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."* Like him we may well have found ourselves calling out, almost in despair, *"Save me*



Lord, I am sinking". This, as much as the story of our fidelity, is the stuff of our journey as men and as priests.

But, again like Peter, we have heard the Lord say to us, *"Do not be afraid, I am with you"*. And we have heard him say to us each time we have in our sorrow for our failings professed our love for him, *"Feed my lambs, look after my sheep"*.

When we were ordained the bishop expressed a hope which was also a prayer: May God, who has begun the good work in you, bring it to fulfilment. Today we are celebrating all the ways in which the Lord has, in our lives and ministry, answered that prayer.

And so yes, like Jesus, we too can say, *"I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes Father, for that is what it pleased you to do"*.

We are those children, chosen by the Lord in our frailty and our limitations, so that through our weakness his strength might be seen and through our foolishness his wisdom might be revealed. In us the truth of the words in the second letter to Timothy is confirmed: We may be unfaithful but God is always faithful for he cannot disown his own self.

May God continue to sustain us by his grace so that we can continue to be, individually and together, living signs that Jesus is still among his people as their Good Shepherd. May he continue to bring to fulfilment what he began on the day of our ordination.