



Fourth Sunday after Easter (Year B)

HOMILY

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday 22 April, 2018

Many of you here in this Cathedral this morning would know that our Archdiocese is in the midst of a process in which, through focusing on various elements of the life of our Church, we are seeking to become, more and more, the people God is calling us to be.

And so, as we travel this journey of faith and discipleship at this particular time in our history, we are trying our best to respond as the Lord would want to. First and foremost, we are seeking to respond to those who have been so badly hurt by the scandal and horror of sexual abuse; we are also seeking ways of renewing and revitalising parish life; of supporting more fully our deacons and priests at a time when so much is being asked of them; of discovering more effective ways to communicate the richness and beauty of our faith, not just to our young people in our schools but to all of us; also, and especially, to everyone of us at a time when our faith is so often challenged and even ridiculed; of reaching out more widely to those in our society who are on the margins, forgotten, or in desperate need; and at a practical level of planning for the future so that we can continue to be a force for good in our society, and a place where the Good News of Jesus Christ is not just heard in words but also seen in actions.

In trying to sum all of this up I chose a motto for our archdiocese for this time of growth and challenge. The motto is this: *that we, the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Perth, are called to be a people walking together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.*

As we celebrate this fourth Sunday of Easter in which we focus on Jesus as our Good Shepherd, it is good for us to reflect on just what walking in his footsteps looks like.

When Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd in this morning's reading, he explains very simply and very starkly exactly what this means: *the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep.* We have just celebrated the feast of Easter and so we understand what Jesus meant when he spoke this way. We know that the joy of Easter Sunday only follows the horror of Good Friday: the day when Jesus, innocent though he was, gave up his life for us. What we sometimes miss is that what Jesus did for us on that Good Friday was the final act in the drama of a whole life given for us. The secret to understanding the mystery of Jesus's death lies in discovering that attitude of mind and heart which burned within him and which allowed him to be faithful in the face of so much opposition and hatred. Jesus could have avoided his brutal death if he had abandoned his commitment to his heavenly Father. He could have avoided the cross if he had allowed fear to rob him of his courage, doubt to destroy his faith, self-interest to win out over generous self-giving. He did not allow any of this to happen and so he went to his death.



And if we are really trying to walk together in his footsteps as our Good Shepherd, then this is what we will also be trying to do: to be people of courage rather than paralysing fear, people of trusting faith rather than people tortured by doubt, and people of large-hearted generosity rather than narrow self-protection.

I suspect that, like me, you might know in your heart of hearts that in reality you are sometimes more fearful than courageous, more doubting than trustful, more selfish than generous. We all bear the burden of our own sins and by the burdens laid on us by the sins of others. The Lord understands this. It is why he once said to his disciples, and today says to us, *“Come to me if you labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest.”* One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is that we are all ill-equipped to deal with our own brokenness, and certainly incapable of healing ourselves. As Christians, however, we believe that what we cannot do on our own we can do if we remain united to Christ, for he will lend us his strength, and his courage, and his fidelity and his faith. This union with Christ is brought about through our life in the Church, and especially the sacraments. Later in this Mass I will pray, as the priest always does as we prepare to receive the Lord in Holy Communion: *Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church.* The whole life of the Church is based on faith, and it is in the sacraments that this faith, this trust in God’s fidelity and love, reaches us most powerfully. We are drawn more and more into communion with the one who understands us, who loves us, who forgives and heals us, who strengthens us and who leads us. It is in his footsteps that we walk. It is along the pathways traced out by him that we travel. It is towards his home and ours that we journey, together, in faith.

I would like to offer just one last reflection. Today, Good Shepherd Sunday, is also Vocations Sunday. It is the day when we recall just how important the ordained ministry is in the life of our Church. Priests and bishops, with the deacons to assist them, are the ones whom the Lord gives to us as living gifts, signs that he is still with us precisely as our Good Shepherd. It is through their ministry that we are invited into this deep communion with the Lord, without which there is no life, for as Jesus himself said: *no-one can come to the Father except through me.* Without the servant ministry of our deacons, and the priestly ministry of our priests and bishops, we simply cannot be the people, and the Church, the Lord is calling us to be.

If young men are to hear and respond to the Lord’s invitation to follow him they will need great courage, great generosity and great faith. I ask you all to pray today, and every day, for all those whom the Lord is calling to this ministry, that they may find the faith and courage they need, and our support and understanding as they set out on the journey. If we are to be a people walking together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd we will need them to walk with us.