



**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C
Safeguarding Day Mass**

Homily

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

**Sunday 17 February 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In today's gospel we have listened to one of two versions of what we call the Beatitudes. The other version, which is perhaps more familiar to most of us, is found in St Matthew's Gospel. There are many common elements in both these versions of the Lord's preaching but there are some differences too. In this Sunday's Gospel, as well as hearing the Lord speak about those things which are part of a blessed life, we also hear him speaking about those things which bring sorrow, distress and even condemnation into our lives.

It should not surprise us that there are two different versions of the beatitudes. The Gospels do not record every word Jesus ever uttered, or every sermon he preached or teaching he gave. We can I think rightly presume that the content of the beatitudes must have been a constant feature of the Lord's preaching not just on two occasions but on many. Like a good teacher Jesus would have understood that really important things needed repeating over and over again, although each time he spoke about the beatitudes he would have done so in a particular way, emphasising different dimensions of this teaching. Those different dimensions are captured in the two versions of the beatitudes we find in the gospel tradition.

It is very helpful, I believe, to link the beatitudes to Jesus' description of himself in Saint John's gospel where he describes himself as *the Way, and the Truth and the Life* (John 14:6) In the beatitudes Jesus points out the **way** to a truly human life in some detail. He reveals to us the deepest **truth** about what it really means to be a human person, created in the image and likeness of God. And all of this gives flesh we might say to something else Jesus says in Saint John's Gospel: *I have come that you might have **life** and have it to the full* (John 10:10).

Jesus offers us the gift of life - a truly human, noble, worthwhile life now and eternal life beyond the gates of death. The problem is, so many of us seem so reluctant to take Jesus at his word. How much of our lives is spent either running away from, or turning a blind eye to, the gift of life Jesus never ceases to hold out to us? It is the strange mystery of our human condition that we chase after what will ultimately bring us sorrow and despair, while we turn our backs on what, or rather who, will bring us happiness, hope and peace. This "who" is of course Jesus. And yet, as



Saint Paul says of himself in one of his letters, very often *we do not do the good we want, but the evil we do not want is what we do* (cf Romans 19-24). And Saint Paul concludes this statement by exclaiming, *“What a wretched state I am in”* – I am sure most of us know exactly how he feels.

It is a fundamental belief of the Church that the Lord's chosen way of offering this gift of life, and the grace we need to do the good and refuse the evil, is through the Church herself. Her teachings, her sacraments and the whole complex reality of our day-to-day life in the Church are all given to us by God to lead us to him in communion with our brothers and sisters in the faith. It is precisely because this is what we believe that the horror of the sexual abuse of the young within the Church is so shameful, so shocking and so destructive in the lives of those who have suffered this evil. As together we journey towards the Plenary Council, and ask ourselves what God is asking of us at this time, one thing we can be absolutely sure of is this: that God is asking us to do everything we can to banish this evil from the Church, to care for those who have suffered so much, and to make our churches and communities places of safety rather than danger, of hope rather than of despair, of faith rather than of confusion, and of joy rather than of despair and weeping.

At the heart of our efforts in our Archdiocese is our Safeguarding project, which is centred first and foremost on our parishes but which is rapidly spreading to every aspect of our Church's life. Today, many of our parish Safeguarding Officers have joined us for Mass and, at the end of Mass, I will invite them to come forward for a special blessing. They are, you are, generous and committed people and every single Catholic in this archdiocese owes you an enormous debt of gratitude. You are the visible face of our determination to make the safety and security of our children and young people a vital part of our life and mission as the Lord's Church. Today I want to acknowledge and thank you, but also to encourage you to see yourselves as powerful instruments in the Lord's hands, disciples who are ensuring that our children and young people are being set free, and kept safe, so as to live the blessed, holy and happy lives about which this morning's gospel speaks. You are not just safeguarding officers – you are ministers of God's presence and his grace.

I ask all of you in the Cathedral this morning to pray for these brothers and sisters of ours who are helping our Church to heal and pointing us towards greater fidelity to our mission to be, together, people who are walking in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.

And now, before we stand to proclaim our faith, I invite you all to pause in silence and prayer for a few moments and listen as the choir sings the special Safeguarding Hymn.