



**The University of Notre Dame Graduation Mass
Homily**

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

Tuesday, 8 December 2015
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

Today is a very important day for at least three reasons.

Firstly, of course, it is the day when we gather here in the Cathedral to celebrate our annual Graduation Mass for the students from Notre Dame University. I welcomed you all at the beginning of this Mass and I want to do so again now. There will be many celebrations of your achievements in the coming days and weeks. As well as this Mass, there are the official graduation ceremonies and I am sure there will be many more private celebrations with family and friends. This is exactly how it should be, for graduation is a significant milestone in anyone's life.

Secondly, today is important for it is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Mother of the Lord. It is appropriate that your graduation is being celebrated on this feast because Mary, our Lady, Notre Dame, is the patron of your university. She is also the patron of this Cathedral and the patron of our Archdiocese. In this sense, everyone here tonight is in some way under the protection of Mary's prayers.

And, thirdly, today is important because, in Rome this morning, Pope Francis opened a special door into St Peter's Basilica and inaugurated a Jubilee Year of Mercy for the whole Catholic world. For the next twelve months, we will all be encouraged to place mercy at the heart of our lives and of our relationships. This coming Saturday evening, I will also solemnly open our own Holy Door, the glass door at the entrance to the Cathedral, establishing it as a symbol of God's invitation to us to enter into the experience of His merciful love.

What do the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and the beginning of the Holy Year of Mercy have to say to us as we celebrate your graduation? I want to suggest to you tonight that they have a great deal to say because they both speak to us of what life and human flourishing are really all about. As you move from university life to a different and, in many respects, a fuller engagement with the society in which we live, this question of human flourishing, both for you and for all those whose lives will be impacted, and hopefully enriched, by you is vitally important. What kind of mark will you



make on others? What impact will you make on our society? What kind of person will you turn out to be? What kind of person do you want to be?

In calling for a Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis is telling us, in very clear language, that a truly and deeply human person is a merciful person. The quality of mercy is one which is central in Christian thought. This is first of all because of the Christian belief that the coming of Jesus among us was an act of mercy on the part of God. Created to live in harmony with God, with ourselves, with others and with Creation, human beings have, perversely, turned their back on this and instead find ourselves often mired in conflict, inner turmoil, seemingly at war with the environment and cut off from God. Despite our technological progress and increasing affluence, the peace we long for seems to be beyond us. It is into this dire situation that God steps, looking at us with compassion and mercy and offering us the gift of His Son who is able to lead us forward if we are willing to follow in His footsteps.

In some ways, the important point here is that the mess in which we find ourselves is our own doing. We have, we might say, brought it upon ourselves. Human calculation might therefore judge that we are only reaping what we have sown, only getting what we deserve. But mercy calculates things differently. It doesn't leave people in the mess they have created for themselves, or demand that they pay for their mistakes. It certainly doesn't demand its pound of flesh, hold grudges or exact revenge. Rather, it allows itself to be motivated by a large-heartedness that looks at life, and people, with compassion, with humility and with forgiveness. Ideally, among all the many things you learnt and experienced at Notre Dame, deeply steeped in the Catholic tradition as it is, this quality of mercy has been clearly evident.

This extraordinary gift of Jesus who is, as Pope Francis puts it, the *"face of the Father's mercy"*, comes to us not just through God's mercy but also through the faith and generosity of a simple, young girl who found within herself the courage to say "yes" to God, even though she was frightened and confused as God's invitation to her became clear. This fear and confusion mark the beginning of tonight's Gospel reading, but it is faith which marks its end. *"Here I am, the servant of the Lord,"* Mary says to the Angel. *"Let what you have said be done to me."* Where does this courage come from? It comes from Mary's acceptance of the promise contained in the angel's words: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will cover you with its shadow."* Mary knew that she would not be alone in all that would come to her in the future. She knew that she didn't have to rely on herself alone. She could rely on God. She said "yes" and stepped into her future with confidence. Her faith was what enabled her to become all that God was calling her to be. That is what faith does for us.

Mercy, large-heartedness, generosity and faith: these are the themes which run through tonight's celebration here in our Cathedral. My prayer for you all is that your lives, your futures, are deeply marked by these qualities. If they are, you will flourish in the ways



that matter; your families, friends and the communities in which you live will be enriched, and the University of Notre Dame Australia will have done its job.

May God bless you all.