



## **Homily - Ash Wednesday 2015**

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

St Mary's Cathedral  
Wednesday, 18 February 2015

*Readings* Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

As we gather in the Cathedral this evening for the annual celebration of Ash Wednesday, we are preparing to come forward to be marked with ashes as a sign of our repentance, and of our desire to turn again to the Lord and to follow His way. As we receive the ashes, we will be reminded that “we are dust, and to dust we will return” or called to “repent, and believe in the Gospel”.

In recent Lenten messages, both Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis reflect on this call to believe. They remind us of the close relationship between faith (believing) and charity – between turning to God and turning to our neighbours in need. We all know what an important part of our lives as Catholics this connection is. This evening, I would like to invite all of us to reflect on this relationship between faith and love as we begin our Lenten journey, travelling the road of obedience and suffering with Jesus as He takes his final journey to Jerusalem, to Calvary and to the new life of Easter.

When I was a little boy, it was the common practice that we give up lollies and chocolates during Lent as a way of “doing penance” and preparing ourselves for the great feast of Easter. As I grew older, I came to realise, as we all must, that Lent is about more than simply “giving up things”. It is about prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It is, in other words, about our relationship with God, with ourselves and with others.

In prayer, we are invited to gaze more closely on the face of Christ, so that we might come to know Him more fully and, in knowing Him, come to love Him more deeply and, in loving Him, serve Him more faithfully as His disciples.

In fasting, whether that be from food and drink, from laziness and self-indulgence, from self-centredness or from anything else that holds us back from God, we are seeking to re-orient our lives so that we re-establish the right priorities. In fasting, in fact, we are seeking to respond to the reminder the Lord gives us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). Lent is a time for asking what it is we really treasure and seeking the Lord's help to see



and judge things as He does. The discipline of fasting helps us to create room in our lives for the things that really matter.

Lastly, in almsgiving, we are trying to open ourselves to the power of God's Holy Spirit who will always inspire and empower us to live lives of active care and concern for others. In reaching out to others in need, we learn what it means to have generous hearts and to have in us "the same mind that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) who "did not come to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

For a Christian, almsgiving (charity) will always be intimately linked with believing (faith). Pope Francis often reminds us that, ultimately, our faith is not in a system, or a set of values, but in a person, Jesus Christ. Real and deep faith for us is born of an encounter with God in Christ and it is this encounter, if we allow God's Spirit to nourish it and deepen it within us, which leads us to commit ourselves in trust to God who has revealed Himself to us in Christ and who continues to encounter us in the life and teachings of His Church. But Pope Francis also reminds us that a genuine encounter with Christ will mean that we begin to see things, and especially people, through His eyes. Care and concern for our neighbours, especially those in real need, becomes not so much a commandment we must obey but an impulse we cannot resist because we are beginning to feel with the heart of Christ.

St John sums this all up very well and, as we travel the road to Jerusalem with Jesus this Lent, I invite all of us to reflect on his powerful words:

*Anyone who says "I love God" and hates his brother or sister is a liar, since a person who does not love the brother or sister he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen. So this is the commandment that God has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother or sister (1 John 4: 20-21).*

Through our contemplation of the face of the suffering Christ this Lent, and through our works of penance and almsgiving, may we all discover where our true treasure lies. And may we recognise that the Christ we meet in the Gospels and in the Eucharist is the same Christ who is waiting to meet us in our needy brothers and sisters.

"Love one another as I have loved you," says Jesus. He showed His love by giving His life for others. He is calling us to do the same.