



## **Homily - St Patrick's Day 2015**

### **Homily by the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
Tuesday, 17 March 2015

*Readings* Jeremiah 1:4-9, Psalm 116, Acts 13:46-49, Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Nearly 25 years ago, when I was a young Salesian priest studying in Rome, I spent a summer visiting the Salesians in England and working in Salesian parishes in Scotland. While I was there, I was asked to preach a retreat to the novices who were preparing for their first vows. As some of them were from the Irish Province, I travelled with them to Dublin and celebrated their first profession of vows together with the Irish Salesians.

My brother had told me that if I ever visited Ireland and found myself anywhere near Galway, I should get on the local bus and travel out to the coast because, if I did, I would be able to visit the small village of Costelloe, also called Casla. I still have a coffee mug which I bought in O'Flaherty's Bar in Costelloe. On it is written the words, "I am a mug from Costelloe". Perhaps it is a good description of me – a bit of a mug!

When travelling back on the bus to Galway, a young teenage couple got on the bus and sat down in front of me. I was not dressed as a priest so they would have had no idea who I was. At that time in my life, I had already been teaching in a large boys' secondary college in Melbourne for some years so I thought I had heard all the bad language there was but I must say that I learnt a few new words that afternoon. What intrigued me, however, was that, in spite of the bad language, every time the bus went past a church the two teenagers stopped their bad language, devoutly made the Sign of the Cross, and straight away resumed their animated discussion.

This reminded me that the Catholic faith was deeply planted in Irish soil and in the Irish soul. As everywhere else in the world the faith existed, and still does, alongside many other threads and currents which are not really an expression of the Gospel but, as Jesus Himself reminded us in one of His parables, there will always be weeds found among the wheat and, if we are too zealous in pulling out all the weeds by their roots, we might end up pulling out all the wheat as well.

St Peter knew this very well. In today's Gospel, when he is confronted with the miracle of the fish and begins to realise who Jesus really is, he is overcome with shame and begs Jesus to leave him alone. "Leave me, Lord," he says, "for I am a sinful man." Peter is not telling Jesus something Jesus doesn't already know. But Peter's sinfulness is not enough for the Lord to give



up on him. On the contrary, it leads Jesus, first of all, to reassure him. “Do not be afraid,” He says.

And then Jesus goes one step further. He decides to draw this weak, imperfect, sinful man into His inner group of disciples and entrust him with the mission to be a fisher of men. We know how the story unfolds. Peter continues to be weak and imperfect. He even, at the crucial moment, denies his Lord. But because he is open to the Lord’s forgiveness, and humble enough to recognise that he needs it, he eventually becomes one of the greatest heroes of our faith and the one on whom the Lord continues to build His Church, through the ministry of the present Peter in our Church, Pope Francis.

The faith and the Church which came to birth through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the faith, and the Church, which St Patrick did so much to spread throughout Ireland. It is the same faith, and the same Church, which the first Irish arrivals in Australia brought to this land, most of them convicted criminals and, therefore, at least in the eyes of those who had convicted and sentenced them, sinful men, just like St Peter.

This did not stop the Lord using them to carry His plans for Australia forward. The presence of the Catholic Church in Australia, and the way in which, in spite of our own struggles, weaknesses and even shameful failures, it has grown to be the largest Christian Church in our land, owes so much to our Irish ancestors in the faith and therefore to St Patrick, the great apostle of Ireland.

What should our response be to the extraordinary tenacity, fidelity and determination of St Patrick? What should our response be to those men and women who, in times of great hardship, loneliness and fear, kept the faith alive in an Australia when our society was not really very hospitable to it? Perhaps it should be that we reflect on the unwavering commitment of our mothers and fathers in the faith, reaching even back to St Patrick himself and beyond him to Peter and the apostles, who never abandoned their faith in the Lord and His Church.

The realisation of how much we owe those who have gone before us can lead us to a deep sense of gratitude – and that gratitude can give rise to a determination to treasure, protect and make use of the gifts we have received. The precious gift we celebrate on the feast of St Patrick is the gift of our faith. Let us thank God for it and recommit ourselves to be the disciples the Lord is calling us to be, after the great example of St Patrick himself.

As the words of the hymn *Hail Glorious Saint Patrick* put it:

*In the war against sin, in the fight for the faith,  
Dear saint, may thy children resist unto death;  
May their strength be in meekness, in penance, their prayer,  
Their banner the cross which they glory to bear.*