



**Homily – 55th Anniversary
Notre Dame, Cloverdale Parish**

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
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Cloverdale Parish
Tuesday, 8 September 2015

As we gather here this evening to celebrate the 55th anniversary of the parish we do so at a time when the role of the Church is perhaps more important than ever and yet in many ways less understood and even rejected due in large part to the failures of those who have betrayed what the Church is really all about.

Tonight then I want to invite you to reflect with me on the mission of the Church, which of course also means, for all of you, the mission of the parish community which gathers around this church dedicated to Our Lady. To do this I would like to offer you three thoughts which might help you evaluate your own experience of, and contribution to, the life of the parish.

My first thought comes from the Second Vatican Council whose fiftieth anniversary we are celebrating at this time. It was Pope John XXIII, now Saint John XXIII, who called the bishops of the world to Rome fifty years ago to discuss the mission of the Church in today's world. Among the many things the bishops said one was particularly significant. They said that the Church could be thought of as like a sacrament – that is a sign and an instrument - of God's presence and activity among his people. The Church, the bishops said, is a sign and instrument of two things: communion with God and unity among all God's people. And so tonight, above all else, we should thank God for all the ways in which, over the fifty-five years of the life of this parish, people have been helped to find their way to God and deepen their relationship of love with him and, at the same time, find themselves drawn into a community of faith where our responsibility for each other in the faith has been deepened and lived out in real and practical ways. Of course we should also reflect on the ways in which the parish today is still this kind of community – where God is encountered, where Jesus is known and loved, and where his people are cared for, accepted, loved and, when necessary, also forgiven. As a parish community you are called to be a sacrament, a living and effective sign, that God still draws us to himself and asks us to draw others into our community of faith and love.



My second thought comes from Pope John Paul II, who of course is now St John Paul II. One of his favourite descriptions of the Church was “the community of the disciples of Christ”. The Pope was highlighting three important things. Firstly we are a community. This means that rather than being a group of isolated and independent individuals we are called to really be brothers and sisters to each other, people who recognise that we belong to each other, are responsible for each other, and can depend on each other. In this sense perhaps another word for “community” might be family. But we are a particular community – a community of disciples. Disciples are people who follow and learn from another, people who know that their gaze must not be fixed on themselves but on their leader. As Christians our leader is Christ. Tonight then, as a parish community, you are invited to consider if Christ really is, not just in theory but also in practice, the source of your inspiration, of your strength and of your hope.

My third thought comes from our present pope, Pope Francis. He is, as we all know, a man who speaks in simple but powerful images. In an interview he gave not long after his election, he spoke about the role of the Church in our modern world. “I like to think of the Church,” he said, “as a field hospital in the midst of a battle. When a wounded soldier is carried into the hospital, you don’t begin by asking him about his cholesterol levels or his blood sugar levels. You heal his wounds. Everything else can come later”. And then the Pope went on to say that this is the great challenge for the Church today –to heal people’s wounds. And then he went on to add: not only to heal people’s wounds but to warm their hearts.

It seems to me that Pope Francis is expressing in very practical terms what the bishops at Vatican II, and what Pope John Paul II, were suggesting when they spoke of the Church as a sacrament of communion and as a community of disciples of Christ. Healers of wounds and warmers of hearts: this is what being a sacrament of communion and a community of disciples of Christ looks like in practice. And all of this means that this is what belonging to this parish community asks of all of you. It is both the gift that you are called to give to others, and the gift that you are meant to receive, by belonging to this parish as part of Christ’s Church.

Tonight, as we look back to the last 55 years, we recognize that, even if it has not been done to perfection, this is the vision that has been kept alive in this building and in this community. Tonight we are invited to remember with gratitude God’s presence, grace and fidelity to the people of this parish, and their fidelity to God. We look around us and know that we have received a precious gift, the gift of our faith, through the faith of those who have come here to open their lives to God and who still come here. And we also look to the future, uncertain as to exactly what the future will look like but certain nonetheless that it will be marked by God’s presence, grace and fidelity. And because of this we are people of hope, and therefore people of joy. May this always be the mark of the community of disciples who gather here in this Church, open to the love of Christ so that, united with him, they might share that love with others.