



## **Homily - Knights of the Southern Cross**

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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As I was preparing my homily for this evening's celebration and reflecting on your very simple but very significant Mission statement – to proclaim and develop Christian values and ethics in society – I couldn't help thinking how similar it is to the words of Saint John Bosco who described the role of the Salesians, of which I am a member, as being to work with the young to develop honest citizens and good Christians. Sometimes these simple statements are the best: they are easy to grasp but at the same time are rich in meaning. They are also full of challenge. In the case of your own mission statement all of you would be aware of the difficulties our contemporary society presents to us in trying both to proclaim and to develop Christian values and ethics.

Not everything about our society is negative: indeed the opposite is true. Some of the values we hold most dear in Australia, such as sticking up for the underdog, treating everyone as equal, and being tolerant of those who see things differently, are in fact values which find expression in the gospels. They are, we might say, "Jesus values". This should not surprise us. Contemporary Australia has been built to a large extent on the foundations of the Christian faith which came to our shores with the first British and Irish settlers, and our national identity has been deepened over the years by the arrival of many migrant communities steeped in the Christian tradition.

In spite of this we must face the fact that our society seems to be losing its connection to many of the values we hold dear. While we often point to the area of sexual morality in this regard, we might also point to another very fundamental value in our Judeao-Christian heritage: the value of community. Where much of our society will be promoting individual rights, the importance of self-reliance and independence, and the idea that we are all free to do whatever we want "as long as it doesn't hurt anybody", the Christian tradition will point us in the opposite direction. It will remind us that from the very beginning of creation God created us to live in communion, harmony and mutual reliance. We are not totally independent persons without responsibility for each other. Rather we are made for each other, are responsible for each other, and are most fully the people we are created to be when we move away from self-concern and move towards an understanding of ourselves as intimately intertwined with each other. While some may say that you can do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else, the truth is that no matter what we do, it will always affect others, for good or evil, because we are so connected to each other. As I



shape the person I am becoming by the decisions I make, no matter how personal or private they might be, I am in fact determining whether those who are a part of my life encounter me as a bringer of life, joy and hope or as a bearer of suffering, pain and despair.

Both our readings tonight speak of some very fundamental Christian values. The first reading is very practical and puts flesh on the bones of the idea that we should be proclaimers and developers of Christian values and ethics. It is as real and down to earth as the need to reject getting angry, to avoid spitefulness and abusive language, to shun greed and dirty talk, to keep away from lies and deception. The gospel reading, for its part, will present the positive values which will mark any truly Christian life: poverty of spirit; a hunger for justice; an ability to weep with those who are suffering; a capacity to bear difficulties and rejection from those who do not share our values. These are all ways of filling out what your motto calls you to: to proclaim and develop Christian values and ethics.

Of course as Pope Francis reminds us in his very choice of name as Pope, we should, as Saint Francis is supposed to have said, “preach the gospel always – and use words only if we have to”. It will be the quality of our lives, much more than the eloquence or force of our words, which will contribute to the transformation or, if you like the re-Christianization, of our society. Christian values and ethics need to be seen in practice: this is our vocation – your vocation as Knights of the Southern Cross

Perhaps all of this can be summed up for you in the words of St Mary of the Cross McKillop, one of your patrons. She once encouraged her sisters with these words: Never see a need without doing something about it. It is a very simple and practical piece of advice but it goes to the heart of the Christian message. It is, we might say, another way of expressing Jesus’ command to us: love one another as I have loved you. But Mary McKillop was a woman of faith as much as she was a woman of action. She also encouraged her sisters to always remember who it was they were following. In doing this she was reminding her sisters, and reminding us, that we are not Christians simply because of what we do. We are Christians, more fundamentally, because of why we do what we do.

To be proclaimers of Christian values and ethics is in the end to be proclaimers of Christ. He embodies those values in himself and he asks that we, his disciples, do the same. Tonight this Mass gives all of us the opportunity to once again commit ourselves to the vocation we have received and, even more importantly, entrust ourselves to the Lord that he will help us, through the gift of his Spirit, to be all that he is calling us to be.