



**Homily - Santa Maria College  
Opening Mass 2016**

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

Santa Maria College, Attadale  
Tuesday, 9 February 2016

Today, we have gathered together to celebrate and formalise the beginning of a new school year for the community of students, staff, families and friends of Santa Maria College.

New beginnings are, more often than not for those who are caught up in them, a mixture of excitement, anticipation, apprehension and uncertainty. I am sure that for those who are new to Santa Maria, both students and staff, this is particularly true. You must be wondering just what the year will bring and hoping that the year will be a successful and enjoyable one for you. But, whether you are in Year 7 or Year 12, or somewhere in between, the first thing I want to encourage you to do is to commit yourselves to doing what you can to make sure that this is exactly how the year turns out, not just for you personally but for everyone else as well. Santa Maria College is a community and people in communities try to look after each other, support each other, and encourage each other. Just imagine what life here at the College will be like this year if each one of you here does your very best to contribute in this way.

Of course, Santa Maria College is not just any community. It is a Catholic community in the tradition of Catherine McAuley, Ursula Frayne and those other extraordinary women who, since the arrival of the first Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia 170 years ago, have been showing in a concrete, practical, down-to-earth way, what the Gospel of Jesus looks like when it is translated into action. As a school in the Mercy tradition, and perhaps more so in this year when we celebrate the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first Sisters, you are being invited, and challenged, to keep this tradition alive. Every religious congregation has its own way of living the Gospel, and has its own special insight into the mystery of Jesus and His mission.

For you, that special insight centres around the idea of mercy, and also of justice, which the College has chosen as its special focus for 2016. I'm sure there will be a lot of reflection on this over the year. In the end, of course, people like Catherine McAuley and Ursula Frayne are still remembered and celebrated today, when most of their contemporaries are forgotten, because they were followers of Jesus: committed, faithful, courageous followers of Jesus - and their dearest wish and that of the women who followed them, particularly in the field of education, would have been that the girls they educated would turn out to be exactly the same: committed, faithful, courageous followers of Jesus. What this means, of course, is that the success of Santa Maria



College will not be measured exclusively, or even primarily, by the Year 12 results, or the quality of the facilities, or by the successes of your sporting teams, important and vital though all these things are, but by whether or not this school, your school, helps its students, its staff and its families, to come to know Jesus Christ, to be captivated by Him and to be ready to allow the example of His life, the power of His teaching and the offer of His friendship to be the guiding principle of their, of your, lives.

One of the things which makes 2016 particularly important for you is the fact that Pope Francis has asked the whole Catholic world to make 2016 a special year of mercy. In doing so, he has first of all invited us to put Jesus at the heart of this year. As a Catholic College here in our Archdiocese, this means that Pope Francis is inviting you, as a community, to do the same. In the letter the Pope wrote to announce this special year, he began with a simple and short sentence which is, nevertheless, full of meaning. “*Jesus Christ,*” he said, “*is the face of the Father’s mercy.*” Because we are disciples of Jesus, called to follow in His footsteps, we should be able to say the same about ourselves: like Jesus, in imitation of Him and relying on His help, we are, or at least God is calling us to be, the face of the Father’s mercy. When people visit your College, or encounter you in other places and find out that you come from Santa Maria, they should go away from the visit of the encounter having experienced, even if they didn’t realise it explicitly, the mercy and love of God.

These are grand words and, in a sense, rather “churchy” words, and for that reason they can easily be forgotten, or dismissed as having nothing to do with real life. So, let me offer you another word to put in place of mercy. It’s a hyphenated word; large-heartedness. It seems to me that, in the end, this is what mercy does in fact look like in action. It’s all about not being stingy and ungenerous in our encounters, in our relationships, with others. We don’t satisfy ourselves with the bare minimum. We don’t make decisions on the basis of how we can fulfill our obligations with the least amount of effort or inconvenience.

Instead, we come from a different place. Today’s Gospel would call it a place of compassion. When Jesus saw how much in need the people were who had been following Him He didn’t send them away as the disciples wanted to do. He didn’t stop to work out the bare minimum He had to come up with to meet their needs. Because, as the Gospel tells us, He felt compassion for them, He provided them with so much that there was heaps left over. He was large-hearted, not stingy, in His response to the needs of those around Him. He is asking us to do the same. This is what mercy looks like.

So, my message and my challenge to you all is this: as members of a Catholic community grounded in the Mercy tradition, can you make “large-heartedness” the guiding principle and outstanding characteristic of every encounter, every relationship, every project that you undertake in this year of mercy? I can’t think of a better way of celebrating 170 years of the mercy tradition here in Western Australia.