



Homily – St Charles Seminary Visit

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

St Charles Seminary, Guildford
Wednesday 24 February, 2016

Book titles are fascinating things - they seek to capture in just a few words what it is taking an author a whole book to properly and fully express. Sometimes, too, the title can be deliberately enigmatic. One of my favourite spiritual writers, the English Benedictine Sister, Maria Boulding, wrote a book that is very well worth reading at this time of the year. The title of the book is this: *Marked for Life - Prayer in the Easter Christ*. Does the title mean that we are marked, chosen, set aside for the gift of life? Or does it mean that, as disciples of the suffering and risen Lord, we will be marked for ever, as if by an invisible stigmata, with the signs of the Lord's passion? Or does it mean both of these together and even more?

Another book with an interesting title is the commentary on St Matthew's Gospel written by Fr Brendan Byrne, an Australian Jesuit. The book is titled *Lifting the Burden: Reading Matthew's Gospel in the Church of Today*. What the author is doing is offering is a lens through which to read the whole of the Gospel, from which, of course, today's Gospel passage comes. Fr Byrne bases his title on the fact that, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus twice refers to the statement placed on God's lips in the prophet Hosea, where the Lord insists, "*What I want is mercy, not sacrifice*" (Hos 6:6). It might also be because it is in Matthew's Gospel, as we heard in the liturgy yesterday, that Jesus criticises the religious leaders because, as He says, "*they lay heavy burdens on men's shoulders but they themselves are not ready to lift a finger to help them*" (Matt 23:4).

I am glad to be with you tonight as you start a new year here at St Charles. In particular, in this Year of Mercy, I want to ask you, as committed Christians first and foremost and then as men engaged in the serious business of discerning a vocation to the diocesan priesthood, to see this year as a precious time in which you will continue the journey of being transformed into men who lift burdens from the shoulders of God's people, leaving behind any inclination to lay more burdens on their already overburdened shoulders.

To do this, you will have to overcome the kind of self-interest which is captured in tonight's Gospel telling of the mother of the Zebedee brothers, who is only concerned that her sons are properly rewarded for all the sacrifices she believes they are making. The grumbling of the other disciples, directed not at the mother but at the brothers themselves, indicates that the brothers are probably behind the mother's forthrightness and also indicates that the other disciples do not want these two brothers pushing the other disciples out of what they think is their rightful place.

Of course, as He so often does, Jesus grasps the opportunity provided by the self-centredness of the disciples to lead them into a deeper understanding of their call. "*Among the pagans,*" He tells them, "*the important people (what we might call the VIPs) lord over everyone else and seek to make their authority felt*". Jesus describes such people and, of course, He is talking here about



religious leaders, as those who like to show off, taking the best places at the table, wearing special clothing that makes them stand out from the crowd, and displaying their learning for all to see and admire. But then comes the crunch. *"This must not happen to you,"* He says to the Twelve who will soon sit with him at the Last Supper and be commissioned to keep His memory alive by leading the community in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist. *"You,"* he says, *"will have to be the servants of the community of disciples. Even more you will have to be their slaves. You will have to be content with the lowliest place, the least powerful place, the humblest place - because that is the place which I, your Lord, have chosen for myself and you are called, before all else, to be a living sign that I, the Lord, am still among my brothers and sisters as their humble servant, their foot-washer, their good shepherd."*

I once heard of someone who fought long and hard to achieve his goal of becoming a priest. He wasn't a good student, and he often found it hard to deal with people, but he had this extraordinary determination to become a priest. And he did. But, once he was ordained, the romantic notion he had of the role of the priest, and his belief that being a priest would bring him the respect and deference he craved, all began to unravel. His view of the priesthood was not really in tune with that of Jesus, whose priesthood was and is about mercy rather than sacrifice, about lifting rather than imposing burdens, about setting people free rather than imprisoning them, about serving rather than being served.

All of us will find it at least as hard as the first disciples did to let the Lord shape us into the priests He wants us to be. There will be so much that needs purifying in us, so much that we will have to let go of, so much that we will need to learn. And, for this, we will need that genuine humility that only God can give us. Tonight, I want to invite each one of you to pray constantly for this gift. Without it, your priesthood, should that be what God is asking of you, will become a burden to you and to God's people, rather than the source of hope and life it is meant to be.

May we all, in imitation of our Lord, be the lifters of people's heavy burdens, setting them free to be all that God is asking them to be. May we have the courage to embrace wholeheartedly this Year of Mercy, with all the challenges it will present to us, and see it as a precious gift from the Holy Father - a gift which can transform us into gifts of grace and hope for God's people.

You will all be in my prayers each day this year as you continue this journey of faith, of discernment and of transformation. May God bless you all.