



**Our Lady of Lourdes Nollamara Parish Feast Day & Year of Mercy Garden Opening
5th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

Sunday 7 February 2016
Our Lady of Lourdes Nollamara Parish

As we gather here this morning to celebrate your Parish feast day, to commission your new School Board and to bless the new Mercy Garden, we do so at the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

In announcing this Jubilee last year, Pope Francis, in the letter informing the Church of his decision, made a very simple but very important statement. 'Jesus Christ,' he said, 'is the face of the Father's mercy.' This is a very beautiful expression and one, I believe, which can help us to understand better the mind and heart of Jesus as we listen, week by week, to the reading of the gospels.

This is certainly true of this morning's gospel which, through recounting the words and actions of Jesus as he calls Simon Peter to follow him, gives us a special insight into the mercy of God.

All of us have a great need to know and understand more deeply the depths of God's mercy. We are ourselves in great need of God's mercy. By reflecting on the ways in which Jesus demonstrates God's mercy, we come to understand how God wishes to enter into our lives, as he entered into the lives of those who encountered Jesus so long ago, and pour out his mercy upon us.

As Christians of course we are not just receivers of God's mercy. We are also called to be instruments of that same mercy. As members of the Church, members of the body of Christ, we together, in our place, and in our time, are meant to be in Jesus the face of the Father's mercy.

As a parish community, as you celebrate your feast day, you might well ask yourselves how well you are succeeding as a parish community in reflecting the face of mercy to each other, to your families, to your friends, to the children in your school, and to the wider community.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to spend just a few moments reflecting on this morning's Gospel, to see if we can come to understand a little better, what it means to speak of Jesus as the face of the Father's mercy and in this way, to come to an understanding of what mercy actually looks like when it is put into practice.

This morning's gospel passage comes from St Luke's Gospel. We are reading through Luke's Gospel all through this year, although of course with Lent starting next week we will interrupt the reading of Luke's Gospel during the period of Lent and Easter time.



There is a very well known Australian scripture scholar, a Jesuit priest who belongs to the same order as Pope Francis, whose name is Fr Brendan Byrne. Some years ago he wrote a very beautiful book on St Luke's Gospel. The book has a particularly striking title: *The Hospitality of God*.

The idea of God's hospitality offers us a very powerful and very beautiful way of reflecting on what Jesus shows us about God. It is a central part of our faith that in the way Jesus speaks to people, and reaches out to people, and enters into relationships with people, we are given an insight into the way God seeks to encounter us. The warm, open and welcoming hospitality which Jesus shows so consistently tells us something very important, and very encouraging, about the God we believe in.

This morning we encounter Jesus as he calls his first disciples. Among them of course is Simon Peter.

Jesus is there in the boat preaching, and at the end of his preaching he asks the fisherman whose boat he has borrowed if they have caught anything. When they tell him they have been unsuccessful all night he invites them to cast their nets over the other side. When they do so they are able to haul in an incredible catch of fish.

Once back on the shore, Simon Peter falls down at the feet of Jesus and says 'Leave me Lord, go away from me, because I am a sinful man.'

Because we know the gospel stories we realise that when Simon Peter describes himself as a sinful man he is not simply displaying false humility. The story of Peter, as it comes to us in different ways through the four Gospels, will confirm that he is indeed a very sinful man.

Perhaps the greatest example of Peter's sinfulness is his denial and betrayal of Jesus at the time of Jesus's arrest. We all remember that when Jesus was arrested Peter had followed him from a distance into the city. When he was warming himself by the fire, he was identified three times as one of Jesus's disciples. Three times he denied it: *I don't know what you are talking about, I have never heard of him. He is nothing to do with me.*

Three times Peter denies Jesus at the moment when Jesus needs friends more than at any other time in his life. The betrayal is all the more devastating because of all that Jesus had done for Peter. Certainly, from a human point of view, it is not hard to imagine what it must have meant for Jesus to be so alone, so deserted - and so rejected and betrayed by those whom he had relied on more than anybody else.

The last chapter of St John's Gospel – which is the last chapter of all the four gospels to be written - shows us Jesus after the resurrection standing on the shore of the lake. The disciples, including Peter, are once again in their boat, fishing. And Jesus, standing on the shore of the lake, calls out to them, 'Have you caught anything?' They reply that even though they have been out all night they have caught nothing. Jesus tells them to throw the nets over the other side and they catch so many fish that the nets nearly tear. It seems that the writer of St John's Gospel, who would have known the whole Gospel tradition well, is leading us to remember the earlier story, from St Luke's Gospel, which we have just read this morning at Mass.



And what happens? Peter recognises Jesus, and jumps over the side of the boat and starts to make his way to the shore. And those of us who know our gospels well know that this is not the first time that Peter has jumped over the side of the boat and started to make his way to the Lord Jesus. On that other occasion Peter started to sink because he took his eyes off Jesus and his faith began to waver. A merciful Jesus reached out and drew him to safety.

This time Peter wades to the shore and Jesus is there cooking a meal, a meal of bread and fish. Again, those of us who know our gospels will remember that there are other stories in the Gospel tradition about Jesus feeding people with bread and fish. What the writer of St John's Gospel is really inviting us to do is to bring back to our minds all of these stories we know about Jesus, but now to see them in a new and deeper context.

Once we have them in our minds, the gospel turns to the story of Jesus asking Peter three times, 'Peter, do you love me?' Three times Peter responds: *Yes Lord, I love you. Of course I love you. You know everything; you know that I love you.* Three times Peter is given a chance to express his love for Jesus, because Jesus knows that Peter needs three opportunities to redeem his earlier betrayals.

There is a sensitivity in Jesus which knows that only one thing will enable Peter to move forward. He needs to be given a chance to turn around his betrayals. And in his love, his compassion, and his sensitivity, Jesus gives Peter those three opportunities. This is what mercy looks like.

Just a few days ago, I was at John XXIII College celebrating the opening Mass for the school year. I was reflecting with the students, as I am now with you, on this theme of mercy. At the end of the Mass I asked them to remember at least one thing in particular. That one thing was a single word which I suggested summed up what mercy looks like when it is put into practice. The word is *large-heartedness*. I would like to say the same to all of you this morning as you celebrate your parish feast day. Can you be a large-hearted community, full of large-hearted people?

If you, this parish community, and we, the community of the Church here in Perth, are going to reflect the face of Jesus, this is what we will need to look like. In our dealings with our husband or wife, in our dealings with our children, in our dealings with our brothers and sisters, in our dealings with our friends at school, our colleagues at work, or our fellow parishioners, can we really be large-hearted people who show what mercy looks like in practice, and what being disciples of Jesus means for us?

As you celebrate your parish feast day today, perhaps you might ask Our Lady for this special favour: that she pray for you as a community so that through her presence and her prayers you might be, and become more and more as time goes by, a community of large-hearted people reflecting the large-heartedness of Christ himself.