



**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)
Homily**

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday 5 February, 2017

As many of you may have seen on the news or read about in the papers, the Royal Commission will tomorrow in Sydney begin a three week inquiry into the Catholic Church in relation to issues of child sexual abuse.

I have written a Pastoral Letter to all Catholics in the Archdiocese concerning this matter and I would ask you all to read it carefully. It is available online and the access details are in the Cathedral bulletin for this week. There are also copies available at the end of Mass for those who would like to take a copy.

This is a challenging but vitally important time for the Church, as we confront honestly the terrible mistakes of the past and commit ourselves to doing whatever we can to make the present and the future much better and safer for our children and young people. It is especially a time for praying urgently for healing for those who have been hurt and for acknowledging our deep sorrow for the pain they have suffered and continue to suffer.

I am conscious that this is a delicate and distressing matter for many of us and I am also aware that many parents will not necessarily want their children exposed to the details of this situation. Can I simply invite you all, therefore, to understand that what I want to say in relation to today's Gospel reading should be understood in the light of my Pastoral Letter and in light of the present challenges we face even if I do not refer to these matters too specifically.

"You are the light of the world – you are the salt of the earth". These words of Jesus are not addressed privately to the group of his twelve apostles. They are directed instead to all his disciples. That this is the case is underlined by the fact that in today's liturgy the Church links this Gospel passage to the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah. There the Lord, speaking through his prophet, addressed not just a special group but the whole people of Israel. *"Your light must shine like the dawn – your light must rise in the darkness."*

This means of course that as disciples of Jesus, we are meant to hear these words as being addressed directly to us, both as individuals, yes, but also as a community of faith. We together are called to be salt for the people of our time. We are called to be present in the midst of our society as a community of faith which preserves the integrity and wholeness of our community, just as salt preserves food from decay. We are meant to be, like salt added to food, a presence which brings out the best in our society. And we are meant to be like a light shining in the darkness



of our society, helping people to find their way to the fullness of life God so deeply desires for all his children.

This is a responsibility we all share as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the task we have been given by the Lord who has called us into his Church so that together we can be a clear and living and attractive sign of the ongoing presence of Jesus in our world today. And because of the greatness and the importance of this task, this vocation, the Lord has called, and continues to call, from among us men whom he chooses to live the priestly life and ministry, and men and women whom he calls to religious life. They are the ones who, through their lives and ministry, place themselves at our service in order to help us all to be what God is asking us to be.

For all those extraordinary women and men who have given their lives in generous service to us, we should give thanks to God and show our support for them through our prayers, our encouragement and our friendship.

We do not succeed in always being the disciples God is calling us to be. As the Church we do not always succeed in being the community of faith, the source of life and light for our world, which God is calling us to be. And as priests and religious we do not always succeed in being the signs and bearers of God's love for his people that God expects us to be.

At this time in our history we are recognising, perhaps more clearly than ever before, just how destructive these failures can be. We are being called to a searing honesty, a deep humility, and a profound conversion. None of us can avoid this, none of us are exempted from it, and this morning I would like to invite you all to embrace this confronting reality with courage. But it is our leaders, our bishops, priests and religious, who at this time are called to lead the Church in imitation of Jesus. This has always been our vocation: we have not always been faithful to it. Jesus led not just by words but by example. He got down on his knees to wash the feet of his disciples. He lived in simplicity and humility. He allowed himself to be led to the cross rather than betray his heavenly Father.

In the days ahead, these failures in our Church will be there for everyone to see. The pain and suffering of so many people who have borne the brunt of these failures, will be re-lived once more. I ask you to join with me in praying for them that this time of suffering might also be, through God's gentle grace, a time of healing and hope. And this morning, here in this Cathedral, dedicated to Mary, whom Jesus gave to us on the cross as the Mother of the Church, I ask you to join me now in entrusting the Church, and all of us, to her prayers: *Hail Mary*