



Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Blessing of the Church and Consecration of the Altar Scarborough Parish Immaculate Heart of Mary Church

Homily

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

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Scarborough
Sunday 23 July, 2017

The Gospel passage chosen for today's Mass is a very appropriate one for the important act of consecration which I am soon to celebrate with you and for you here in this beautifully renovated and renewed church.

I say this because, in presenting to us some of the Lord's parables about the kingdom of heaven, the Church is inviting us to reflect on the mystery of the Lord's Church, of which this parish is an important part and an important manifestation.

In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is often found talking about the kingdom of heaven. In some of the other Gospels, he is more often found speaking of the reign of God. Of course they are really the same thing, but while we think of a kingdom as a place, we think of the reign of God more in terms of the personal relationship between the ruler and his subjects. Perhaps we might think of it like this: as the reign of God spreads, and he is willingly and joyfully enthroned in the hearts of more and more people, a new society is gradually being built up, a society where, to use the words of the Lord's prayer, God's kingdom comes because God's will is done.

It is the vocation of the Church, and therefore the vocation of this parish, to be the place where together we learn how to enthrone God in our lives as the ruler of our hearts and where we draw strength from each other's faith and commitment, from our readiness to share what we have with each other, and from our willingness to be a community of forgiveness, compassion and hope.

Pope Francis famously expressed all this in a very beautiful but still demanding image. The Church, he said, is meant to be like a field hospital in the middle of a battle field. As such it is a place, or at least is meant to be a place, where people can come to have their wounds healed and their hearts warmed. We know that the Church has not always been this in practice. Sometimes we have lived out our faith, or rather failed to live out our faith, in such a way that instead of being healed people have been hurt; instead of having their hearts warmed they have found their hearts growing cold. As a Church we are a community of people called and chosen by God, but we are also a community of people who do not always walk in fidelity to all that God is asking of us. We are, to put it bluntly, a community of sinners. Indeed, as today's Gospel expresses it, we are a community which contains both wheat and weeds.



This is why it is so important for us to remember that at the heart of our community stands Jesus. This is true for the Church spread throughout the world, and also of course true for the Church which gathers around this place of worship. If we are to be what God is calling us to be, then we will need always to remember that rather than relying on our own strengths and talents, resources and gifts, important though these are, we must look beyond ourselves to Jesus. He is the one we are following, he is the one to whom we are committing our lives, he is the one whom we recognise as our Way, and our Truth, and our Life.

And so we come to the consecration of the altar. The altar takes pride of place in any Catholic church. It is in fact the only object in the church which is consecrated in the dramatic way we are soon to witness. The pouring of the sacred Oil of Chrism, and the anointing of the whole altar with it, highlights for us that the altar is a powerful and eloquent symbol of Christ and of his sacrifice of himself for our sake. It is for this reason that the priest kisses the altar at the beginning and end of each Mass: not, as many people think, because it contains the relics of the saints, but rather because it is both the table around which we gather for the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the altar on which the Lord's body and blood, sacrificed for us, are offered. In the sacred building which is the church the altar is the sacred place where the Lord's death becomes present to us and from which we enter into a profound communion of love with the one who gave his life for us as we receive his body and blood in Holy Communion.

And it is this, all of this, which is the source of that faith, that energy, that love and that commitment which enable us to make the Church the healer of wounds and warmer of hearts that the Lord calls us and need us to be.

The woman to whom this parish is especially dedicated, Mary Immaculate, is remembered in John's Gospel as the one who said to the stewards at the wedding feast in Cana, "*You do whatever he, Jesus, tells you to do*". Mary says the same thing to us this morning. It is her message to you as a community dedicated to her. Look to Jesus, listen to his words, treasure them in your hearts and put them into practice. My prayer for this parish is that you will continue to gather week after week, year after year, around this altar, this symbol of Christ's love for you, and in doing so grow in your readiness to listen to him, to love him and to follow in his footsteps.