



**Bateman Parish, St Thomas More Church
25th Anniversary**

Homily

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

St Thomas More Church, Dean Road, Bateman
Sunday 5 November, 2017

One of the privileges I have as the Archbishop, is to be able to join with local communities of faith for the celebration of special occasions, such as jubilees like the one you are celebrating today. Last Sunday I was at South Perth, celebrating the centenary of the establishment of the parish there, and the eightieth anniversary of the dedication of Saint Columba's Church. You have a little way to go before you get to the stage of celebrating your centenary, but the continuing presence of the Church in Western Australia over such a long period of time should give you every confidence, based of course on the fidelity of God rather than on our own gifts and talents, that in seventy five years a different archbishop will be gathering with a different community here in this place to celebrate your own parish's centenary.

As time goes by it becomes clearer and clearer to me that fidelity, God's fidelity to us, which is the source of our sometimes faltering fidelity to God, is the bedrock upon which a Christian community such as the one that gathers here this morning, actually stands. I often find a phrase from the second letter to Timothy coming to my mind: perhaps, somewhat irrationally, I think of these letters as written to me in a particular way because I bear the same name. The author of the letter is reminding Timothy of the gifts he has been given, the challenges and difficulties which accompany those gifts, and the way in which Timothy should respond. Summing it all up he says to Timothy, with great realism, "*we may be unfaithful but God is always faithful, for God cannot disown his own self.*"

We have gathered here in this church this morning to celebrate, first and foremost, God's fidelity to this community over the past twenty-five years. It is true of course that the community was here before the Church was built and consecrated. As Angela will recall for us in a few moments as we prepare our gifts for the Eucharist, the real beauty of a community is not found in its buildings but in its people. But the presence of this Church building and the beauty of this Church building remind us of what makes us the unique community that we are. Today's second reading from the second letter of Peter expresses it beautifully: we are part of *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who has called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light.* In saying this of course the author of this letter prefaces it all by reminding us that at the heart of our vocation, our mission as Christians, there lies the urgent need to "*set ourselves close to Christ*". In the end, this is what makes us a truly Christian community: that we know, and understand, and experience ourselves as being a community which has Christ at its centre; Christ, who is our Way, and our Truth and our Life. And this of course is where the question of fidelity comes in: we are among those privileged people who have been called out of darkness into the wonderful light of Christ. We are the ones who have been



given the extraordinary gift of faith, not because we have earned it or because God likes us more than God likes other people. No, we have been given the gift of faith because in God's mysterious plan we are the ones through whom God wishes to offer the gift of faith to others. It is this gift, in all its mystery, beauty and complexity, to which we are called to be faithful.

We might wonder why God has chosen us when there seem to be so many other people more gifted, more naturally generous, perhaps even more deeply open to the spiritual side of life than we are. But the fact remains that God has chosen us and, as Saint John's gospel reminds us, the reason for that choice is so that we might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. And what is that fruit? John's gospel again offers us an answer: *by this*, Jesus tells us in that Gospel, *everyone will know that you are my disciples: that you love one another as I have loved you*. The Lord has chosen us so that, in and through our lives of faithful discipleship, the world in which we live – the world of our families, our friends, our colleagues and our society – might begin to see that Jesus is, indeed, the Way we are all called to follow, the Truth we are all invited to believe in, the Life we have all been created to live. Our Christian faith teaches us that, in Jesus, God has spoken his full and final Word to humanity. The question of who God really is, this question which is so vital for humanity once the existence of God is acknowledged, has been answered in Jesus. And we are the privileged ones whom God has chosen to be the bearers of this Word into the concrete and specific world in which we live our daily lives.

This extraordinary privilege is, at the same time, a heavy responsibility. When we begin to understand its importance we inevitably also begin to doubt, quite rightly, our ability to rise to this challenge and to remain faithful to this task. This is why in the Letter of Peter we are encouraged to set ourselves close to Christ. *Without me*, he says in John's gospel, *you can do nothing*. But he also says in the same gospel that if we live in him, then he will live in us. What we cannot do alone we can do as long as we remain, as individuals and as communities of faith, as closely united to him as the branches are to the vine. We have to know where our life-blood comes from: it comes from him.

For 25 years people of faith have gathered in this Church, allowing the Spirit of God to mould and shape them into a community of faithful discipleship. They have found strength, forgiveness and renewal in times of weakness and failure, comfort and hope in times of sorrow, support and companionship in times of joy and celebration, understanding in times of confusion, and courage in times of fear and uncertainty.

My prayer for this community as you now begin to move into the future is that all of this will continue to mark your experience of coming to this church building and being part of this community. May you, together with all of us in our archdiocese, become more and more a people who walk together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.