



## **Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)**

### **Nollamara Parish Our Lady of Lourdes Church 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

#### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Nollamara Parish  
Sunday 24 September, 2017

This anniversary is an occasion for gratitude, for acknowledgment, and for hope. I think it's also an occasion for us as a Christian community to reflect on just why it is that we come to church week after week. Or even more fundamentally perhaps, to reflect on the question, just why is there a Church at all. And in saying that I don't mean the building, I mean us, the people. The people who together are called to be disciples of Jesus, living side by side with Jesus, present in the world. And as you, as a parish community look back over the last 50 years – which some of you are able to do – and as you look around you at the present situation and as you look forward in hope, I think we're always invited to look at the past, at the past, at the present and at the future in terms of what we understand the Lord is asking of His Church. Because any parish community is meant to be a very locally-grounded example of what the Church is meant to be, what God is asking of His people.

One of the things that is particularly striking about this parish church building is that you cannot come into it without understanding immediately what is at the heart of this building, and that of course, is the altar. You come here much more often than I do, perhaps you're used to it, but for someone who only comes occasionally, the thing that strikes you when you walk through the door is that the altar is at the heart of everything. That's really important because what that tells us is that this parish community, this local Catholic community, which is meant to be a living example of what the whole Catholic Church is all about, is a Eucharistic community.

A community that in the end is founded on the celebration of the Eucharist, on our willingness and our readiness and I hope I could also say our eagerness to keep coming back week after week, to be together, so that together we can grow in our understanding of what it means to be disciples of Jesus. Together we can draw strength from each other's faith, and the ways in which each of us with our own struggles and our own challenges, and continue to walk this journey of faith. And the ways in which all of us together look not to us so much, but look to the Lord. That is symbolised powerfully in the altar.

To be a Eucharistic community is more than anything else to be a Christ-centred community, because what is the Eucharist without Christ? That leads me to this morning's Gospel. What does it mean to be Christ-centred? Who is this Christ, who we gather together in order to encounter, to understand, and to love. Who is this Christ? And that's exactly the question that Jesus in this morning's Gospel puts to His disciples and therefore I think it puts to each one of us. I don't think



it stretches our powers of imagination too much to imagine the Lord saying to each one of us individually, and to us as a community this morning, who do you say I am? Who is Jesus for this parish community? Who is Jesus for each one of you in your own story, in your own family, in concrete situations of your own life? Who is Jesus, what place does He have? It's an important question, and it's a question which we as the church constantly need to keep asking ourselves. Because if we don't have Jesus at the heart of our Church, we should close the doors, shut up shop and go home. The Church is nothing if it is not grounded in Jesus. We as disciples are nothing if we are not grounded in Jesus. And I think the Lord does challenge each one of us this morning to ask, who do you say I am?

When Jesus put that question to His disciples, they gave a whole lot of answers. Well first of all, the question was, what do other people say about me. And they said, well some people say you're Moses, or some say you're John the Baptist come back to life, some say you're one of the other great prophets. But of course, all those answers were incorrect. They were heading in the right direction, because they meant that the people who were talking about Jesus at least understood that He was in the line of the great prophets of the Jewish tradition, that He was a man of God, that He comes from God.

So they weren't completely wrong, but they were a long way from the full truth. And I think that's a possibility for each one of us as individuals and also for us as a community of faith: we might have some understanding of Jesus, but is it the full understanding of Jesus? Is it the true Jesus, or is it a Jesus who in some cases and in some ways, we have created for ourselves to make Him a little bit more easy to deal with? A little more comfortable, a little less challenging.

In response to the answers to Jesus about what other people were saying, Jesus then says to the disciples, then what about you? There's the key question, the unsettling question. What about you: who do you say I am? And of course Peter, as he always does, speaks up in response: you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And this is important too, because Peter, speaking as the spokesperson for the group of the 12 apostles, has lived with Jesus, has travelled with Jesus, knows Jesus better than anybody else, has no doubt spent hours and hours sitting with Him, listening to Him, coming to understand Him better – and Peter gets it right, you are the Christ. You are the Son of God, you are the Messiah for who we have been waiting for so long. And Jesus congratulates him, blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because the Father in heaven has revealed this to you.

This gives us another clue of where we should look for the answer. The answer will come to us from the Lord, if we're open to Him in our prayer, in our Communion, in our life together, to look to Him to help us, rather than just relying on ourselves. It's on the basis of Peter's declaration of faith of course that Jesus then goes on to say, you are the rock on which I will build my Church. In our Catholic tradition, we see in this the beginnings of the role of the bishop of Rome, the successors of St Peter. So there's a lot in this morning's Gospel that can help us and you together as a parish community reflect on what it means to be a community of disciples, with Jesus at the heart of everything. And about how important it is to make sure we get Jesus right.

Some of you may be aware that we are hearing only half the story this morning, because if you go home and open up your Gospels and you continue to read, you'll find that immediately after this, Jesus begins to explain to His apostles exactly what being the Messiah is all about. So on the basis of the confidence that Jesus now has that the disciples do understand: He opened His



heart to them and said, you do know that the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem and be handed over to the authorities and be mocked and scourged and crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead. And Peter, the spokesperson, the one who always jumps in, says, no way Lord, this must not happen to you. He's speaking out of love no doubt, maybe out of fear, but Jesus who just a moment ago was praising him now criticises him very harshly. Get behind me Satan, He says, because you are an obstacle in my path. The way you think is not God's way, but the human way.

This is an important addition to the story that we always need to remember if we're to remember this story properly. Peter knew, the Lord had revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah. But Peter was determined to have the kind of Messiah he wanted, not the kind of Messiah that God wanted. This must not happen to you, says Peter. I'm not interested in a Messiah who's going to suffer, I'm not interested in a Messiah that's going to be mocked and scourged and crucified. I want a victorious Messiah, I want a successful Messiah. But that was a human way of thinking, not God's will.

So I think that sets out kind of a warning for us. And this might sound paradoxical, but it's possible to get Jesus right and get Jesus wrong all at the same time. And that's why we have to constantly allow the Lord to say to us, who do you say I am? And to measure our responses against the faith of our church. Against the faith of a church which puts the Eucharist at the heart of everything, and at the heart of the Eucharist, is the willingness of the Lord to lay down His life for us. This is the man we follow. This is the man who reveals the face of the Father to us. This is a man to whom it is worthwhile entrusting our lives. And that's the task of any parish community, including this parish community. To be a community of faith where we all grow in our ability and our desire and our eagerness to commit ourselves to entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus, and follow in His footsteps. That's my prayer for this parish community this morning, as you celebrate this anniversary of the dedication of this beautiful church. May you continue to grow in a faithful community of disciples, so that you can be a living sign to the rest of our Church and the rest of our society, that Jesus continues to be present among His people.