



**Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord (Year B)
Consecration of St Joseph Pignatelli Church, Attadale Parish**

HOMILY

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

Wichmann Road, Attadale
Sunday 13 May, 2018

We gather here this afternoon for this wonderful occasion as the Church throughout Australia, and in many other parts of the world, celebrates the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord to the glory of heaven. It is unusual to combine two such solemn celebrations - the consecration of a new church and such an important Feast of the Lord - in the one celebration. Each, in a very real sense, deserves to be the sole focus of a liturgical celebration.

Nevertheless, precisely because of the deepest meaning of the mystery of the Lord's Ascension, the consecration of this beautiful Church this afternoon can take on special meaning for us. This is because this celebration, so rich in symbol, invites us to reflect on what this church, and of course more importantly the community which gathers here for prayer and worship, is called to be for the world in which we live. What is the relationship of the Church, and of the faith community which will gather in this church, with the risen and ascended Lord?

To speak of the world in which we live is of course to speak first and foremost of the concrete world of the community which will gather here now and into the future, and then of the concrete world of the families, friends, colleagues and neighbours who will be enriched by those who come here to grow in faith and love, and who then carry the gift of the Lord's presence to all those they, you, encounter.

How might we understand this mystery of the Lord's Ascension? St John's Gospel tells us that when Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Jesus and finally recognised him, she fell at his feet and clasped them. Jesus immediately said to her, "*Mary, do not cling to me as I have not yet ascended to my Father*". St Luke's Gospel tells us that when the two disciples on the road to Emmaus encountered Jesus on their journey, they did not recognise him until he broke the bread with them at the evening meal, just as he had done with his disciples at the Last Supper. Luke's Gospel also tells us that on that occasion, as soon as Jesus had shared the bread with them, he vanished from their sight. And on many occasions after his resurrection we find Jesus telling his disciples that he has to leave them because, unless he does, he cannot send them the gift of his Holy Spirit. In all these ways Jesus is indicating that his disciples will have to learn to search for him, and find him, in new ways that will be mysterious, and at times elusive, and always challenging. Mary Magdalene certainly had to learn to let go of the Lord as she had known him before she would be able to truly find him again. Perhaps the same may be true for us.

The gospel tradition is very clear that the Ascension, the return of Jesus to his Father in heaven, was the necessary prelude to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This would be the



beginning of a new, mysterious presence of the Lord Jesus and at the same time the beginning of the journey of the Church through history, a journey which continues still today and whose completion we simply do not know. What we do know, however, is that in the strange ways of God's gracious love, we are inserted into this journey. Our presence here this afternoon is testament to this truth. And because the Lord has called us into his Church, we have our part to play. We are not bystanders watching from a distance as the Church keeps moving into its future: we are pilgrims together, brothers and sisters, supporting each other as we travel the paths the Lord sets before us.

As we continue our journey we might see this church building as being, in a sense, a little like the hostels in which pilgrims of old used to stay overnight, and still do today, in order to refresh themselves for the next day's journey. Those pilgrims needed food and drink to strengthen them. They needed hospitality, a sense of welcome, and an assurance that they would be safe until they were ready to set out again. They needed a chance to rest, to share their stories with others, to reflect on what had happened throughout the journey so far, and perhaps to tend to the blisters and cramped muscles and aching bones they had developed along the way. And they needed time to reflect on and prepare for wherever the journey might take them the next day.

Here in this church building we as disciples following in the footsteps of our Good Shepherd, will be able, or should be able, to find all these things. Ideally we will find a warm and lasting welcome through the waters of Baptism; we will find a sense of direction as we listen to and ponder God's holy Word; we will find strength and courage to keep going and remain faithful through the gift of Confirmation; we will receive renewal, new hope and undreamt-of compassion through the Sacrament of Reconciliation; we will perhaps find that special companion for the journey through the Sacrament of Matrimony; we will find shepherds to guide us and care for us through the Sacrament of Holy Orders; we will find comfort and healing through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick; and most importantly of all, through the Eucharist we will find the food and drink for our journey in the Lord's own broken body and spilt blood, given to us to draw us into that deep communion with the Lord, without whom we can do nothing. And in and through all of this, and through our encouragement and support of each other in our journey of faith, we will find ourselves, together, becoming exactly what the Lord, in and through our belonging to his Church, has created us to be: the living signs and bearers of God's extraordinary love for all his people.

It is true that the Church is not fundamentally buildings but rather communities of disciples. But it is precisely because we are communities, rather than autonomous and self-reliant individuals, that we need to come together. Jesus called his disciples together, shared his life with them, and formed them into a family who could, together, say not *"My Father who art in heaven"* but *"Our Father who art in heaven"*. May this beautiful church building be a place where we together find strength for the journey we are all undertaking. May it be a place which so shapes us that people say of us, *"See how these Christians love one another"*. And may it be a place from which the love of Christ spreads out to all we meet.