



## **Commissioning of New and Transferring Principals**

### **HOMILY**

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

The Chapel of St Michael the Archangel, Leederville  
Friday 23 November 2018

I think an opportunity like tonight is a really important one, and I don't want to let it go past without sharing with you and inviting you to reflect with me on a really important question for all of us, who in one way or another, exercise leadership in the Church. Most of the people present in the Chapel tonight are Principals or other staff members in our Catholic school, and others who aren't (generally speaking) work here in Catholic Education WA. We're all involved together in the leadership of our Church, and all of you are involved in one of the most central and important missions of the Church, which is the education of our young people.

It's important for me to remind us all that this is a mission of the Church, this is a vocation, this is something that has been entrusted to us all, first and foremost by the Lord. So I think it's really important for us, from time-to-time, to reflect on that deeply and ask ourselves a very fundamental question: Why do we have the Church at all? Why does God continue to call people into the Church, people like us, and invite you to take up the leadership of His people? Because if we don't reflect on that, then there is a danger that, in practice, we won't be conducting ourselves any differently from people who might work in other parts of the education world across Australia. We're not better than anybody else, but we are different. Our mission is not a better mission than anybody else's, but it is a different and unique mission. We, as leaders, need to understand that.

It's a big question, isn't it? What is in God's mind and heart (if we can dare to speak of God's mind and heart, and pretend that we can understand it) in calling the Church into being in the first time, and then sustaining it with the gift of His Holy Spirit, in spite of all the many ways we find to mess it up? I could go on for hours and hours about this important question. I want to offer three suggestions, and invite you to reflect on how they might impact on and expressed in your own particular situation, and what it's calling us all to do as collaborators in the world of Catholic Education here in WA.

The first thought that I wanted to share with you is a thought from the Second Vatican Council, I was talking about this the other day and said that people like me, and other Bishops probably and some of you here, we have a memory of the Church prior to the Council. We know what a revolutionary change the Council brought to the life of our Church. For others of you, it's just ancient history. It was a very significant moment in the journey of the Catholic Church in the lifetime of many of us. Pope John XXIII was the one who called the Council together – he is now



Saint John XXIII. In doing so, what he wanted to do was to ask the Bishops of the world to gather and reflect together on that fundamental question. “What is the Church for in our modern world?”. And for us, I think that question comes down to: What is the Church for in WA at this time in our history? What is the Church for in my local school community in this time in our history? The Bishops gathered in Vatican II gave many answers to this, but one of the central ones comes out of the main documents of Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*. It is expressed this way: The Church, the Bishops said, is like a Sacrament – that is a sign and an instrument of two things; communion with God and unity among all people. So that means that your parish school, or your secondary school, or your local educational community, is like a Sacrament. It’s meant to be a sign of people’s communion with God, and people’s communion with each other. It gives us a criterion by which we can conduct an examination of conscience for ourselves.

“How is my school going at being a sign of communion with God? How successful is my Catholic school community being in drawing everybody, particularly the young people, into a deeper communion with God?”. If it’s not doing that, or if we don’t understand that that’s one of the fundamental reasons why it exists in the first place, then we really badly misunderstood the mission of Catholic Education: to be a sign of communion with God, and a sign of communion amongst all people. Community, communion needs to be a fundamental value of any good Catholic school. Notice that the fathers of Vatican II didn’t just call it a sign, they said it’s also an instrument. It’s not just meant to be something that has a theory about it, but something that is actively working to achieve it. So there, I think, is the first thought that we might take away with us tonight and reflect on as we come to the end of one year, and look forward to the next. “How am I going to help my school community be a much more powerful, effective, and unambiguous sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among God’s people?”.

The second thought that I wanted to share with you – and I must say these three ideas aren’t meant to be separate from each other, but need to feed in and out of each other – comes from Pope John Paul II, who is now Saint John Paul II. He was Pope for a long time, he wrote many things about the Church, he said many things about the Church, but he had a favourite expression that occurs over and over in his writings, and in his talks and homilies. It is this: “The Church is the community of the disciples of Christ”. It’s that simple; your Catholic school is a community of disciples of Christ. The three elements of that are equally important; first of all, it’s a community. Catholics know instinctively that, like it’s part of our DNA, that we’re not meant to find our way to God independently from everybody else. We’re meant to go to God together, and to help each other find our way together – that’s absolutely at the heart of a Catholic school because we are dealing with the formation of young people.

A primary responsibility of any Catholic school is to help people find their way together to God as a community of disciples. Disciples – no matter how young or old they are – are people who know that they’re supposed to look beyond themselves, and beyond each other to someone else who is their leader, their guide, and the person they look to for inspiration and assistance. That someone else, of course, is Christ. So unless Christ is actively present and recognised as the



heart of every Catholic school community, then there's something vital missing. I was at Seton Catholic College this morning giving the Archbishop's Lifelink Award to the college. The motto of that school is "Seek Christ". The motto of the school closest to where I live has a motto "Centred in Christ". These express beautifully that a Catholic school community is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ. These two things are very similar to each other, and I think we understand one in relation to the other.

The third thought that I wanted to share with you comes from Pope Francis, who tends to speak in very concrete images. Not long after he was elected as Pope, he gave an interview to a Jesuit magazine and he was asked many things, but one of them was to speak about this understanding of the role of the Church in the modern world. He said something that many of you would have heard before, but I think is really worth reflecting on, particularly in light of the other two things I shared with you.

Pope Francis said: I like to think of the Church as a field hospital in the middle of a battle. And when a soldier is wounded in the battle, and carried into the field hospital, the doctors and the nurses don't start their treatment by checking his blood sugar levels, checking his cholesterol levels ... no, said the Pope. The first thing they do is to heal the wounds. Everything else, important as it is, has to come after that. That, he said, is the mission of the Church in the world today: to be a healer of people's wounds. He added something else: also a warmer of people's hearts. What a wonderful summing up of what a truly Christian community looks like.

Your school needs to be a place where people can come, the young people who are the students there, the teachers and the other staff members who work there, the families who send their children there, and anybody else who comes into contact with the school community – it needs to be a place where people's wounds can be healed. No-one should come into a Catholic school community and go away more wounded than they were when they first came. No-one should come into a Catholic school community and go away with hearts that have grown colder, rather than hearts that have grown warmer.

Here is another way in which we can evaluate how our school is going, just as priests can evaluate how their parish is going, just as bishops can evaluate how the diocese is going: "Are we a community that knows how to bring healing to people and warmth into the coldness of people's lives?". Do you know what ties all of these three ideas together? It's the person of Jesus.

You are all familiar with the stories of Jesus that we have in our Gospels that we listen to over and over again in homilies and in celebrations of the Eucharist and other liturgies. I don't think you could find a better description of the ministry of Jesus than to say that he was a healer of wounds and a warmer of hearts. Page after page after page of the Gospel tells us that. If we're a community of disciples, of this Jesus Christ, how could we be anything other than healers of wounds and warmers of hearts? How could we be anything other than people who want to help each other and others find their way to communion with God.



This is a great challenge for us, but I think it also helps us orient ourselves in terms of reflecting on the year that has gone past, and thinking about the year that lies ahead next year. We know where we want to go, we know what God is calling us to. We might recognise that we've got a fair way to go – that's just part of being human – but as long as we know where we're headed, as long as we know what God is asking of us, and as long as we're ready to commit ourselves to continuing the journey, then we can be confident that we are becoming the Catholic Education system in WA that the Lord is calling us to be; then we are becoming the Church in WA that the Lord is calling us to be.