



Commissioning of Parish Youth Ambassadors

Homily

Most Rev Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth

Sunday 11 November 2018
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

At the Conclusion of the recent Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, I was fascinated to discover that the bishops decided to structure the final document from the Synod on the story of the encounter between the Risen Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus as they fled from Jerusalem in fear and deep disillusionment after the cruel death of Jesus on the Cross. Their hearts were heavy as they carried the bitter burden of horror, of shame and of the destruction of all their hopes in Jesus. His agonising death seemed to them to destroy any hope that Jesus might really have been all that he claimed to be. Imagine their joy when they eventually realized that Jesus was indeed risen, and that he really was the divine Son of God. I wanted us to listen to this story just before Mass began this evening because the Synod was held very much for people like yourselves. It is a good thing for us to feel connected to and part of this important event in the life of our Church.

In choosing the story of Emmaus, the bishops identified three key ideas which I would like to propose to you this evening as a way of understanding what our Catholic faith, and within that your roles as Youth Ambassadors, or generally as young committed, even if questioning, Catholics is really all about. The three ideas or themes are these: firstly, he that walked with them; secondly that their eyes were opened; and thirdly that they left without delay.

As I reflected on these three ideas I couldn't help noticing how much they tied in with my own episcopal motto which you can see above the bishop's chair. It is made up of three Latin words: *via*, *veritas* and *vita*. They are the words Jesus uses to describe himself when he says to his disciples; I am the Way, (*the Via*), I am the Truth (*the Veritas*) and I am the Life (*the Vita*).

When the bishops at the Synod nominated as their first key idea the fact that *Jesus walked with them* they were really pointing to Jesus as the Way. It is true that in the Emmaus story Jesus walked with the disciples as they were running away from Jerusalem, but the purpose of his walking with them was to eventually lead them to the realization that they had to turn around and take a different way – his way. He encountered them as they were – frightened and disappointed and confused – but he did not leave them as they were. On the contrary, as the gospel tells us, by the end of the story, when they rush back to Jerusalem, they talk about the way their hearts



were burning within them. Fear had been replaced by courage, despair by hope, and doubt by certainty. And why? Because they let Jesus walk with them and they let him show them a better path to follow. Jesus is indeed our Way.

The bishops then remind us that in the encounter with Jesus *their eyes were opened*. Running away from Jerusalem the two disciples were utterly convinced that everything was over, all hope was lost, and they had been deceived. But because they encountered Jesus, and listened to him, they were led to a truth which was the exact opposite of what they had come to believe. There must have been something about what Jesus said to them, and the way he said it, that opened their eyes and their hearts. But there must have been something too about the disciples themselves which enabled them to truly listen. Deep within them there must have been a search for the truth which was so insistent that when the truth was proclaimed to them they knew it for what it was. This is what a true encounter with Jesus, a true walking with Jesus, does for us: It touches that deep desire for the truth that lies within us and sets us free to recognise that truth and begin to want to live by it. Jesus is indeed our Truth.

The bishops then recall that these two disciples “left without delay”. In fact, what they did was return as quickly as they could to Jerusalem. They had run away from what they had experienced as the place of death and now, having encountered Jesus, having listened to him and having believed him, they set out for the same place, knowing that it was in fact the place not of death but of new life. Two things jump out at me here. The first is that whenever we have a real encounter with Jesus it is life-changing. We can’t stay the same, locked into our own preconceptions, imprisoned by our own fears, or defeated by our own sense of hopelessness. We have to change, let ourselves be unsettled, take the risk of trusting Jesus at his word and rush forward into the life he has designed for us. Jesus is indeed our life.

Many of you have heard me say often that unless Jesus is absolutely at the heart of everything we do in our lives as Catholics, young or old, then we have missed the whole meaning of our faith. There are teachings of the Church to be believed and there are moral and ethical commandments to follow, but they will only appear to us in all their glory and all their wisdom, and will only have the power to convince us and claim our commitment, if we see them in the light of the one who is the only Way for us to follow, the only Truth to which we can confidently commit ourselves, and the only Life which can bring us fully and forever alive. Christianity without Christ is dead. Without Christ the Church crumbles and falls.

When Saint John Paul II was elected Pope, at the homily he gave at the Mass of Inauguration, he made an impassioned plea that I would like to also make to you tonight as we bring the Year of Youth to a close, as we commission our Parish Youth Ambassadors, and as we turn our gaze to the Australian Catholic Youth Festival to be held here in Perth next year. So let Saint John Paul’s words be those which ring in our hearts as we continue this Mass.

Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ.