



**The University of Notre Dame Australia
2019 Graduation Mass**

Homily

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

**Monday 16 December 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

As we enter the third week of Advent, with Christmas only nine days away, the Gospel reading for today's Mass might seem a strange choice. It is set, after all, towards the end of Jesus's life, and focuses on the growing antagonism directed at Jesus by the religious leaders of the day. What has this growing opposition to Jesus, which will lead directly to his death, have to do with the simple beauty of the Christmas stories of his birth we will soon begin to listen to and celebrate? And perhaps more pertinently for us gathered here in the Cathedral to celebrate the graduation of so many fine young, and some not so young, students from Notre Dame, what has this got to do with us tonight?

The answer, of course, is that every life, including that of Jesus, is not a series of unconnected events which can be isolated from each other. For every one of us, including Jesus, our life is an unfolding story, an ever-developing narrative, which begins in the womb of our mother and continues throughout the years of our life, however few or many those years may be, until God calls us to himself.

At the beginning of our life we are totally dependent on others, even for our very survival. Gradually we enter more and more into the adventure of building our own lives, determining our values, setting our course and in a very real sense constructing our future. We remain connected to others, of course, in many profound ways, but the nature of the relationship changes. Where once we were totally dependent on others, we begin to understand as we grow and develop that it is others who are now dependent on us. We realise more and more that what we do, and say, and decide, has the potential to enrich, or sadly impoverish, the lives of those around us. The gospel stories reassure us that this was, indeed, the case for Jesus, just as much as it is for us. The teaching of the scriptures reminds us that Jesus was like us in all things, with just one exception - but a very significant one. Jesus never sinned, never swerved from the way of his Father in heaven, never betrayed his values or compromised his mission. For anyone, therefore, who finds him or herself at a major turning point in their lives, as all of you who are graduating tonight do, Jesus becomes a model to follow, a source of inspiration, and a companion for the journey. He can help us ensure that we are enrichers, and not impoverishers, of the lives of others.

Tonight, therefore, as we prepare to celebrate his birth, it is not inappropriate to contemplate him as he nears the end of his journey through life. In doing so we see just what radical fidelity to a life of integrity looks like. Such fidelity, it seems to me, comes from a very clear sense of who I am, who God is, and what the nature of this wonderful gift from God which is my life is really



calling me to. To appreciate that my journey through life is precisely a journey of growing understanding of myself, of others, of the world around me, and of God without whom nothing exists and nothing makes sense, seems to me to be essential for a life lived with integrity and courage.

Tonight you are graduating from Notre Dame University. It is an institution which espouses a particular world view, as every institution, every university, does. Sometimes these world views, these ways of making sense of life, are deliberately and even aggressively, secular. Just as primary and secondary education in government schools is by definition secular, so too is tertiary education in public universities. This, of course, is not the case at Notre Dame. If it were we would not be gathering here in the Cathedral to publicly celebrate your graduation. Notre Dame, as its name implies, is unique in WA. It is deliberately, though hopefully never aggressively, Christian in its values and Catholic in its expression of those values. It is a university which stands in direct relationship and profound continuity with the first universities in the Western world, which were all founded as works of the Church.

More fundamentally, Notre Dame stands in profound continuity with Jesus himself. Just as for Jesus the reality of God determined absolutely everything he said and did, and was the very bedrock of his life, so the reality of God, made known to us in the person, life and teachings of Jesus, and made real and accessible for us through the life and teaching of the Church, is at the heart of Notre Dame. In the end your university only exists, and exists as the kind of institution it is, because of the Church, which in its turn only exists because of Jesus.

In speaking of the Church's mission, Pope Francis, and before him both Pope Benedict and Saint John Paul II, insisted that it is the Church's task and privilege to endlessly propose the beauty of our Christian and Catholic faith, but never to impose it. Faith is a gift and it is the Church's role to continue to offer this gift - but gifts are always offered, and can be freely rejected, or accepted and then ignored, or warmly received and gratefully used. Notre Dame, as a Catholic University, will never step away from this mission and this privilege. You have been the beneficiaries of this great gift and as you now move into a new phase of the adventure of your lives, you will decide what to do with this gift. Will you say *"thanks but no thanks"*? Will you accept the gift but put it quietly away in a corner of your lives and perhaps even forget where you left it? Or will you see it for what it really is: a gift which can only enrich your lives and, through you, enrich the lives so many other people?

In Jesus's own lifetime some people walked away from him because his teaching was too challenging. Jesus turned to his disciples and said to them: *"What about you? Will you walk away too?"* Peter replied for them all and said, *"But Lord, where else could we go? You have the words of everlasting life."* Tonight perhaps Jesus is asking all of us the same question: *will you walk away?* What will our answer be?