



## **Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**All Saints Greenwood Parish  
Monday 11 February 2019**

Whenever I visit a parish to celebrate a special occasion, such as today's feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, I find myself reflecting on what special message the Lord might have for all of us as he draws us together for a particular reason. Our Catholic tradition encourages us to be very mindful of the mystery of God's providence in our lives. We are not here in this Church this evening by chance – we are here because God has called us here. We can be sure that God has a precious gift to share with us. It is our task to do what we can to be ready to receive this gift, to listen attentively to his voice, and to be open to the work of his Holy Spirit within us.

Tonight we celebrate the gift of Mary, the Mother of the Lord Jesus, who as the remarkable story of Lourdes reminds us is not just a great woman from the past but also someone who is and wants to be a living presence in our lives today. Tonight, I invite you all to reflect with me on the role Mary plays in our Catholic faith and in our own spiritual journeys.

Many Christians of other traditions sometimes are puzzled by our focus on Mary. So too, sadly, are some Catholics. To them it seems that focusing on her runs the risk of diverting our attention from Jesus who is the heart and centre of our faith. They also think that perhaps we exaggerate Mary's importance. After all she appears only rarely in the Gospel stories, and in Saint Mark's gospel, the earliest of the gospels to be written, she is paid very little attention.

One of the great gifts of the modern study of the bible, however, has been to show us that it is not so much the number of times Mary appears in the gospel stories but rather the significance of the occasions when she does appear that reveals just how important Mary is. Although Saint Luke's gospel is the one which seems to pay Mary the most attention – this is where we find the story of the Annunciation for example - it is perhaps Saint John's Gospel that really helps us understand Mary's importance. In John's Gospel we might say that Mary appears at the beginning and the end of the story, so much so that the whole of the life and ministry of Jesus is framed between two significant events. The first is the story of the wedding feast at Cana which we have just listened to in the Gospel reading, and the second is the story of the death of Jesus on the cross.

When we read these stories carefully we see that they are both linked to the role Mary plays in the life and faith of the disciples of Jesus. When Mary tells Jesus at the wedding feast that the



wine has run out Jesus at first seems reluctant to intervene. *“My hour has not yet come,”* he says to his mother. In spite of this Mary is very confident that Jesus will act. She turns to the stewards and says something that has echoed down through the centuries and is still heard in the Lord’s Church, and in our hearts, today if only we would listen. *“Do whatever he tells you.”* The stewards listen to Mary, they act on Jesus’s command, and the water is turned into wine, more wine in fact than the guests could ever have consumed. God’s gifts are always abundant! And then the writer of Saint John’s Gospel tells us something very important. *“This was the first of Jesus’ signs,”* he writes. *“He let his glory be seen and his disciples believed in him”*. At the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, about a week after his baptism by John in the River Jordan, it is Mary who initiates his ministry because of her concern for the young married couple and Mary who gives expression to what lies at the heart of the Christian life: **that we do whatever Jesus tells us to do.**

Mary will only appear again in St John’s gospel when she stands at the foot of the cross. It is there that Jesus will entrust Mary to John, the Beloved Disciple, and entrust the disciple to Mary: *“Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother”*. The scholars will remind us that this is much more than a simple expression of care by a dying man for his mother. Much more than that it is the creation of the new community of disciples who will carry the message and the life and ministry of Jesus on into history. It is the creation of the Church. Mary is the great woman of faith, and there is no Church without trusting faith. John is the great model of discipleship – only he remained with Jesus when all the other disciples deserted him – and there is no Church without faithful discipleship. Mary and John, given to each other by Jesus as he dies on the cross, represent all of us who, in spite of our failures, weakness and sin, are still trying to be faith-filled disciples of Jesus. Mary and John stand before us, at the foot of the cross, reminding us of who we are, and who and what we are called to be. This is true of each of us as individuals, of course. It is also true, and equally so, of this community which gathers in this parish.

And so my prayer for you and my plea to you as you celebrate this feast of Our Lady is this: be a shining example of faithful discipleship and trusting faith to and for each other, so that together you can be this for the rest of our Archdiocese. This I believe is why God has called you together to form the Catholic community in this parish. May Mary, who at Lourdes was revealed by God to be the mother of compassion and healing, bring healing through her prayers for us to our troubled hearts and minds so that we can be set free to be all that God is calling us to be.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.