



Installation of Fr Grant Gorddard

Homily

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

**Sunday 8 September 2019
Scarborough Parish**

Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. None of you can be my disciple unless you give up all your possessions.

These words of Jesus from today's gospel are challenging and confronting words for all of us and perhaps today as we formally install Father Grant as your parish priest they are particularly challenging for him.

The life of discipleship is not easy for anyone. The following of Jesus, the taking of Jesus at his word when he tells us that he is our Way and our Truth and our Life, is difficult in a society and a world which would encourage us to walk a different way, to commit ourselves to a different truth, to live a different kind of life to the one Jesus holds out to us. Indeed why would we want to follow someone who tells us that we must hate our father and mother and brother and sister and children and indeed our own lives? What are we to make of someone who tells us that we must give up every possession we have if we wish to be his disciples? These things don't only seem extreme to us; they seem in fact to be cruel. Is this what Jesus is really asking of us?

The answer of course is "no". Jesus does not ask us to hate our parents or our family or to live in destitution with no possessions to our name. What he does ask of us, however, is to be ready to give up whatever we must in order to live according to the way he sets out for us. This becomes clear in another story in the gospel where a young man asks Jesus what he, the young man, must do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds by telling the young man that he must keep the commandments, and when the young man says to Jesus that he has kept them all since his earliest years the gospel tells us that Jesus looked at this young man and loved him. It was then that Jesus presented this young man with a challenge: *if you wish to have the fullness of life*, he tells him, *then go and sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and then come and follow me*. The Gospels tell us that when the young man heard these words his face fell and he walked away sad because he was a person of great wealth. This story which at first sight seems



to confirm today's words from Jesus that we must give up all our possessions is really not about wealth at all. Rather it is about whatever it is in our lives which is stopping us from giving our complete "yes" to whatever God is asking of us. For the rich young man the problem was his attachment to his money, but for us the problem might be our attachment to something else: to our good name for example, or to our certainty about the rightness of our own opinions, or perhaps to our desire to control and dominate others, or perhaps our selfishness which prevents us from reaching out generously to those who need us. The challenge for each of us is to have the insight and honesty to recognise what it is that is holding us back from living the life to which God is calling us, and then have the courage to do something about it.

This readiness to be ready to respond to God's will, no matter the cost, is of course exactly the way Jesus lived his life. It might seem strange to say this but this is why we call Jesus a priest. Throughout history priests are people who offer sacrifice in order to draw themselves and others closer to God. The unique and special thing about Jesus is that the sacrifice he offered was the sacrifice of himself - of his whole life - not just at the end when he was dying on the cross but from the very beginning. Jesus' whole life was an act of self-giving to God so that he might bring others closer to God. This is really at the heart of what being a priest is all about in our Christian understanding, and it is why we speak of ourselves as a priestly people. Our Catholic tradition teaches us that there is only one priest, Jesus himself, but our tradition also tells us that we are drawn into a close and intimate relationship with Jesus through our baptism, our confirmation and through our reception of the Eucharist. United to him, and therefore sharing in his priestly identity, we are indeed a priestly people. We belong to him, we are part of him, and when we live our lives in imitation of him we show our priestly identity by making our lives a gift for others just as he did.

To live as Jesus did is not, of course, an easy thing to do. We need the help of God's grace. And so, from among us, God chooses some men and calls them to give their whole lives to him and to his people in a special way in order to help all of us live truly priestly lives in union with Christ. In our Catholic tradition we call these men priests because they share in the priestly heart of Christ in a special way so that in and through them Christ can lead us to also live our priestly identity.

Father Grant is one such man who heard this call from the Lord in his heart, responded to it with generosity and faith, and now accepts from his Bishop the task and the privilege of being a priest among the people of this parish. Through his ministry, through his presence among you, indeed through his whole life, Father Grant is called to be a living sign of the priestly heart of Christ, a living sign of the ongoing and very real presence of Jesus among his people - among you - as your Good Shepherd, as the one who is ready to lay down his life for you.



Today then I ask you to pray for Father Grant as he formally accepts this role which he has been fulfilling now for some time. I ask you to support him, to encourage him, and in every way you can to help him to be the priest God is calling him to be - to be that clear and powerful sign that Jesus is still among us as our Good Shepherd. Father Grant will make mistakes as we all do and he, like all of us, will need compassion, forgiveness and understanding. At times, like Jesus himself, Father Grant will call you to great things: to real sacrifice; to fidelity in the face of temptation; to courage in the face of opposition.

At times like this listen to him with open hearts and open minds and carry his words home with you and reflect on them together. As your parish priest Father Grant will be your leader in the faith, but just as Jesus gathered apostles and disciples around him because he could not do everything himself, so Father Grant will need to gather around him people who are willing to walk with him, assist him, advise him and support him. I ask you, therefore, in the midst of what I am sure are your already very busy lives to do whatever you can to help this parish grow and thrive and become the community of disciples Jesus is calling you to be. You are not called to hate your father or mother or sister or brother or children.

You are not called to give up every possession. You are being called to allow Jesus to be the Way you follow, the Truth to which you commit yourselves, and the way of life you choose to live by. Father Grant stands among you as the one whose responsibility it is to remind you of this invitation and to help you to respond with courage and fidelity. I will pray for him and pray for you all that together you might be the community of disciples that the Lord needs you to be.