



Anniversary Mass for the Legion of Mary

Homily

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

**Saturday 20 March 2021
St Columba's Church Bayswater Parish**

As most of you would know, probably much better than me, Frank Duff was a young man of twenty-three when he became a member of the Saint Vincent De Paul Society in his native Ireland. By its very nature, and under the inspiration of St Vincent De Paul, the Society leads its members into a very concrete and personal encounter with the poverty and brokenness in the lives of so many people. This was certainly the case in Dublin in the early years of the 20th century and it is still the case, even here in Perth, in the year 2021. Even in wealthy societies like our own, poverty, loneliness and despair are realities which call out for our compassion, our generosity and our practical assistance. The members of the Saint Vincent De Paul Society, in many respects, lead the way in responding to these urgent needs. In many ways they demonstrate what Pope Francis means when he talks about the disciples of Jesus having the smell of the sheep. We do not care for the poor from a distance- we care for them through our contact with them, our presence to them.

Just as the St Vincent De Paul society is still very active here in our Archdiocese so, thankfully, is the Legion of Mary which, in a sense, is a child of the Society and draws so much of its inspiration from the deep conviction of Frank Duff, nurtured in the Society of Saint Vincent De Paul, that practical service and care for those in need is not an optional extra for a Christian but a fundamental part of every Christian vocation.

Having been involved in both groups at various times in my life it seems to me that the special gift of the Legion of Mary is to make explicit what is already implicit in the spirituality of the Saint Vincent De Paul Society: that is, of course, the personal striving for holiness which Frank Duff focused on very deliberately in establishing the Legion of Mary. He understood instinctively, long before the Second Vatican Council addressed it very clearly, that holiness was not something for the few but is the universal call of God to each one of us. In recognising this, and through reading the works of Saint Louis Marie Grignon De Montfort, Frank Duff also realised that in Mary of Nazareth, as she is presented to us in the pages of the gospel, we find the perfect example of a spiritual and apostolic life lived as a disciple of Jesus.

It was Pope Paul the sixth, Saint Paul the Sixth, who reminded the whole Church that devotion to Mary must be firmly grounded in the Scriptures. There we encounter Mary as the first and best



disciple of Jesus who, as the gospels put it, listened to the Word of God and put it into practice. There we discover her to be a woman of extraordinary faith, who is able to say a free and joyful yes to God because she knows that she has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit and is empowered by the grace of God. There we see Mary as the one who leads others to her Son telling them - telling us - to do whatever Jesus tells us, just as she told the stewards at the wedding feast of Cana to do the same thing. There we stand in wonder at the courage and fidelity of Mary who, when most of those closest to Jesus had abandoned him, stood in unimaginable sorrow and suffering at the foot of the cross watching her Son die. And there too, in the pages of the Scriptures, we see Mary with the apostles and the early Church gathered around her, waiting for the coming of God's Spirit, encouraging the early Christian community by her motherly presence, just as she continues through the ages to encourage the Church - to encourage us - through her motherly presence.

Frank Duff knew instinctively that the call to live as a disciple of Jesus, reaching out to the poor, the broken, the lost and lonely, because in doing so we reach out to Jesus himself, is a call to allow the faith, the courage, the compassion and the concern of Mary to grow in our own hearts. Frank Duff knew instinctively that by making a place for Mary in our lives and by entrusting ourselves to her prayer for us, we would be opening ourselves to the transforming power of God's grace so that we can indeed do whatever he, Jesus, tells us.

As we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Legion of Mary this year, and especially today, let us commit ourselves to having on our lips, more and more often, that classic prayer to Mary which expresses so simply and yet so perfectly the heart of our faith about her: *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners: pray for us now and pray for us at the hour of our death.*