



**Dedication Mass
Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, Jurien Bay**

Homily

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

**Saturday 29 May 2021
Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, Jurien Bay**

All of the readings that we've listened to this morning in one way or another, point us in the direction of reflecting on the significance of what we're doing here this morning, dedicating and consecrated really this church and this altar.

We all know that the Eucharist is at the heart of our faith as Catholics. And that is why, in this celebration, which is quite a unique one - and one that most people only ever get to see once or twice at most in their lives - the centerpiece of the whole celebration in a way, will be the consecration of the altar. But the altar sits within the context of the church building: and the church building only exists within the context of the true Church, which is the People of God.

So I wanted to take this opportunity just to reflect briefly with you on what it means to say, as Paul does in the second reading this morning, that we are both building and being built into a spiritual house for God, which is built on the prophets and the apostles and which has Christ himself as the cornerstone. What does all that mean?

So often, we use these words (we might almost call them Church words) and not think our way into them, to understand what they might be getting at. So I thought I might just offer you three, hopefully, relatively brief suggestions about trying to understand what it means to be in this building, this very beautiful building, which really only exists because of the community, which has brought it into being and which will gather here to celebrate, to give honor and glory to God. And then to take all of that out into the community, to your families, to your friends and the communities in which you live.

What does it mean to be the Church of God?

There are many ways of thinking about this, but I just wanted to offer three.

The first is one that comes from the writings of the Second Vatican Council. It's over 50 years now, since the Second Vatican Council. And in many ways that council turned the Church upside down and set us off in a new direction. In one of its most important documents, called *Lumen*



Gentium, which means the *Light of the Peoples*, in that document there are a variety of descriptions of what the Church is all about. But one of them I think is very helpful for us, if I explain it to you just a little bit, because it says the Church, in Christ, is like a sacrament. And just in case we've forgotten our catechism and couldn't remember what that meant, they've very helpfully explain: and that is 'a sign and an instrument of unity with God and unity among all people'.

We, you here who come to this parish, you are like a sacrament. This is your vocation.

What does that mean? To be a sign and an instrument, a means through which God brings people into communion with Him and into unity amongst themselves.

So this church will really be just an empty shell, if what happens in here, doesn't deepen our understanding of ourselves as a people who have a mission, a two-fold mission: to be in an ever deepening union with God Himself in Jesus, and then to be a community that draws people together in a communion of love, so that they can then go out and witness to Jesus. That's what it means to be a people who are being built into a holy temple for God. And that's what this church building exists to help.

The second thought is one that comes from St. John Paul the Second. He was the Pope for a long time and, of course, wrote many things and gave many talks and all of that sort of thing. But when he spoke about the Church, he had a very favorite expression that he liked to use over and over again. He said, "the Church is the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ."

It's a very simple idea: first of all, we're a community, but we're a community of disciples - which means we're not following each other, we're not gazing at each other - we're following the Lord upon whom we gaze, and especially we do that when we gather here in this church. We are a community of disciples, a community of people who know that they have someone whom they are following, with all that that implies. So that's the second thought.

And then the third thought comes from Pope Francis.

Now as you know, Pope Francis, unlike many of the Pope's we've had in recent times, is inclined to speak in much more concrete images. One of these very early descriptions of the Church, which has become very famous - I'm sure most of you have heard of it - he said, "When I think of the Church, I think of the Church as if it were a field hospital in the middle of a battle."

And Pope Francis said, "When a soldier is wounded, and is brought into the field hospital, the doctors and the nurses don't begin by asking that soldier about his or her cholesterol levels or blood sugar level, or any of those sorts of things – they begin by healing the wounds."



The Holy Father went on to say that this is the great mission of the Church today, to heal people's wounds. And then he added something more, he said not just to be a healer of people's wounds, but a warmer of people's hearts.

I'd like to suggest that we just sit with that for a moment. Because when Pope Francis talks about the Church, he is talking about that reality which St John Paul described as the Community of Disciples, which the bishop of Vatican II described as a living sign of God calling us into communion with Him and with each other.

This community, those who belong to this community and gather here and those who belong perhaps to many of the parishes across the Archdiocese, and gather together in their own parishes, but all of us in our own communities are called together to become people who know how to heal the wounds of others and warm the hearts of others.

And if, at the end of each day, you want to look back on your day and think, 'how did I go, living out my discipleship?' You may like to ask yourself, 'where was I a healer of people's wounds, when was I a warmer of people's hearts, where was I a healer of people's wounds?' As one of the early Church Fathers used to say, "by this people will know that those people are Disciples of Christ by the way that they love each other."

All of this lies behind the decision to build this building here, in this place. Because we can't be those things on our own. We can only be those things by coming together, supporting each other in our faith, helping each other in our own struggles and weaknesses, and drawing strength from the Lord who can send us out, to be in his name, a healer of people's wounds and a warmer of people's hearts.

This is why this building is so important. Not because of the building itself so much, but because of the people who will gather in it and what God will do with you, as you gather together.

So my prayer today is that this building, which we dedicate today, will stand here for many generations to come and be a place where people can come, find their own wounds healed, find their own hearts warmed and find here, within the community, the strength to then take that healing and take that warmth and share it with others. This is what it is to be the Holy Church of God. This is what it is to be being built together into a temple of God's will.