



**Fifth Sunday of Easter
35th Anniversary of Ballajura Parish & 25th Anniversary of Mary Mackillop Church**

Homily

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

**Saturday 27 April, 2024
Mary MacKillop Catholic Church, Ballajura**

One of the great joys and great privileges I have as the Archbishop, is to be able to travel from parish to parish, celebrating these very special occasions, these anniversaries of the foundation of a parish, or the consecration of the church, in our case tonight, both of those events. So, it really is a great joy for me to be here, and I want to repeat my special gratitude to Father John, and to the parish leadership team for the invitation.

And also, because I forgot to do it right at the start, to welcome Father Vinh Dong and Fr Greg Donovan, who I imagine many of you would know, it's great to have the two of them here with us.

Anniversaries are really important occasions. They're full of joy and also, I think, full of gratitude. One of the things that we want to do this evening, I'm not going to do it in this homily, but what we want to do is to think back over the last 35 years of the life of this parish, and then also the last 25 years of worshipping in this Church, and think of all the ways in which God has been able to touch so many lives, because this parish exists in this part of the Archdiocese of Perth.

As I was preparing my few thoughts for this evening, I was thinking about how many sacraments must have been celebrated in this church over the last 25 years. And then, in other past places within the parish, of course, for the previous 10 years, how many Masses have been celebrated? How many confessions have been heard? How many baptisms have been performed? How many weddings have taken place? Just think of all the ways in which this parish and this church have been at the heart of the life and faith of so many people.

In our Catholic tradition, sacraments, of course, are very important. And we know because we're well trained, I guess we can say in our faith, to know that one of the things about sacraments is that we have to look beyond what we see, to the deeper thing that lay behind what we see. If we attend a baptism, we might see the priest simply pour water over the head of a child and say the words of baptism. But we know that something much deeper than that has happened. That God is at work, doing something special with the life of that child. We know that tonight, the same as every time we celebrate the Eucharist, the priest will say the prayers of consecration over the



bread and wine. And we know that we're called to look to the deeper reality of the presence of Jesus among us as one of us to be our strength and our guide in life.

So, sacraments are realities in the life of our church, which invite us to look more deeply at what is happening. As I think about those things, I think it's not a bad idea, to broaden our idea of sacraments. We have the seven sacraments, as we all know, but the idea of sacraments is bigger than that. The idea of a sacrament is that when you look at a human reality, you see something very important - which is sometimes hidden - is actually taking place. In that sense, I wanted to ask you to reflect tonight on the fact that in thinking about it that way, we could think about this parish, as a kind of a sacrament. We look around and there are a lot of people and we've gathered here, and we gathered here to pray, and we're gathered here to support each other in our faith.

But there's something much deeper happening as we gather together. We're not just a group of people. We're a group of disciples, and we gather together, and especially when we celebrate the Eucharist together, we become - we already are - we become more deeply the body of Christ. We become a sacrament of the presence of Christ alive and at work in this part of the Archdiocese. And I think that's an invitation, particularly on an occasion like an anniversary, for us to reflect on what it means to belong to a parish. What it means to belong to a community of disciples. What is God inviting us into? What's God calling to? What is God asking us?

I just want to mention three things very briefly, because we can't be here all night. But the three things very briefly that might help us understand just what it is that God is doing in calling us together. It's well over 50 years ago now that the Second Vatican Council took place, and it was indeed at that Council, that the bishops who gather from all around the world decided to speak of the church itself as a kind of a sacrament, a sign, and an instrument of two things - of unity with God, and of communion, among all of us people. So, this parish, as a part of the church, is a kind of sacrament. And it's a sacrament of two things - of the call to be in communion with God. And that's why this church building is so important. That's why coming together to celebrate the Eucharist is so important, because that's where we both experience and deepen our communion with God. But we're also called to be a sacrament of communion among all God's people. And that's why we have to look to each other, and make sure that we recognise in each other person here in the church tonight, in each other person whose lives we encounter in the journey of our own life, we need to learn to see these people, as our brothers and our sisters, in Christ - we all belong together. We all are dependent on each other. We all need each other. And we're all responsible for each other. That's what it is to be a member of the Body of Christ, a member of the community of disciples of Jesus.

I think that we should be tonight, very grateful for all the ways in which over the last 35 years, so many people have contributed to making this parish, a very good expression of this reality of the



church, a place where we come together, to enter into deeper communion with God. But we also come together to enter into a deep unity with each other. The second simple thought - it really is contained in the first one is something that Pope John Paul II once said. He said the best way to describe the church is simply to call it a community of the disciples of Christ. I think that's very important. We're a community, but a community of disciples and whose disciples, are we? We're the disciples of Jesus Christ. So, He is the one we follow. He is the one we look to. He is the one who is our guiding light through our lives.

Tonight, I think we're asked to, in a sense, examine our consciences and say, is that true for me? Is Jesus really the guiding light of my life? Or have I kind of pushed Him aside a little bit, and put other things in His place as the most important things in my mind? So, we're a community of disciples of Jesus Christ.

And then the third thing - you'll be very familiar with it – it is something very beautiful that Pope Francis said very early on in his time as Pope. He said that he likes to think of the Church as a kind of a field hospital. When a wounded soldier is carried into the field hospital, the doctors and nurses don't first ask him about his cholesterol levels or his blood sugar levels, or any of those things - they heal his wounds. And after they've healed his wounds, then they can look at those other things. And then the Pope went on. This is what the church is all about. God has called the church into being so that it can be a healer of people's wounds, and then he added, a warmer of people's hearts. For thirty-five years, how many people have found their wounds healed by coming to this place? For thirty-five years, how many people have found their hearts warmed by coming to this place? Every time someone comes to this parish and finds healing and warmth and hospitality and welcome, the parish is being true to its vocation. So, these are just three simple thoughts that I wanted to offer you and to invite you to reflect on as you look back over the last thirty-five years with gratitude, as you look around you with satisfaction at the present reality in this parish, and as you look to the future with hope.

You are called to be living sign of communion with God, and the unity among yourselves. You're called to show by the way you live and work and walk and talk, that you are truly disciples of Jesus. And you're called to be a community that can heal people's wounds and warm people's hearts. Under the leadership of Father John (Jegorow) for all of these years, this community has continued to grow more and more into a living example of this great idea that we have for the Church. So tonight, we give thanks for that. Tonight, we are grateful for all that has been. And tonight, I think the invitation is for all of you as the parish community to recommit yourselves to being even more than you are already. It is a wonderful example of how a community of disciples of Christ really can respond.