

50th Anniversary Jubilee of St Christopher's Cathedral

Friday 17 March 2023

Solemnity of St Patrick

Homily: Fr Trenton van Reesch, Cathedral Administrator

Two weeks ago I stood in this very ambo, with the agonising privilege of presiding at the Requiem Mass of a 37-year-old mother, whose battle with breast cancer, had, one week earlier, come to an end.

Before the Mass, in a quiet Cathedral – soon to be brimming with mourners – this mother's 10-year-old son, sat silently the front pew; numb (I couldn't image) to his new reality.

His feet swinging, his mind racing, and his heart, undoubtedly breaking. He was looking around, quizzically, as if to search for answers; reassurance even. Then, he began pointing, pointing to the windows above. He looked over to his father standing alone at the casket of his dead mother, and asked: "Is that who my mum is with now? His Father, standing alone... looked up... exhaled, and simply said: "Yes mate"

The little boy managing a smile... his voice cracking, responded... "She'd like that."

Friends... in a moment of a family's greatest agony... what a powerful testimony we have, to the piercing Witness of this Place.

This evening we gather to celebrate 50 Years of Saint Christopher's Cathedral, as the Mother Church of the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, in Her 75th Year as an Archdiocese.

Yet, in truth, we gather to Celebrate much more, than I think we first realise ... Indeed, what we Celebrate in this Cathedral this evening, a Cathedral now flooded with Light – is a Truth far more magnificent!

For Saint Christopher's Cathedral... is more than the bricks and mortar which hold Her together...

Rather, she is and long has been, the physical representation of the community of faith which gathers within. She, as the Bishop sits, become the place where the Diocese and so Christ's Body in the Local Church finds her Unity, Identity and Oneness.

Those who built this Cathedral – desired to build on a firm foundation, and that foundation was not just a matter of architecture and engineering, but the foundation of Christ himself. They wanted the church to tell the story of His Living Body, what the 5th Century Bishop of Hippo, St Augustine called the *totus Christus*, the *Whole Christ*.

For they knew that *here*, more than anywhere else, the risen Jesus would be encountered, and the joy and responsibility of that encounter proclaimed in the Lives of those who passed through her doors.

For centuries – cathedrals the world over – have, rightly, and powerful so, depicted the *Life of Christ* in their stain-glass... In cultures and times where many were largely illiterate –stain-glass became a powerful tool of teaching and passing on the Faith.

Saint Christopher's however, is unique in this respect... for within *her* walls She still continues to teach; to catechise. However, *Hers* is a story of the Jewels in that Crown of Christ's Body...The Saints, and so too all the Baptised!

Hers is a glorious expression of the life of Christ, in the members imbue with the varying charism of the Holy Spirit, *Walking Together* on the pilgrim way...

Friends, for this reason, we can proclaim: Saint Christopher's is indeed, the Cathedral of the *Communion of the Saints*. A living Image of the Mystical Body with Christ as Her head. Here we sit within a Visible Sign of the invisible truth of Baptism

On the 4th of February 1973, Archbishop Christopher's predecessor Thomas Cahill, anointed the walls of this Cathedral, with the Oil of Sacred Chrism – where the marble crosses and candles now stand – setting this building aside as holy, where the living stones who gather within, come to worship and give glory to God (1 Peter 2:4-6).

This of course, is the same Sacred Oil which marks the crown of the Newly Baptised, claiming them as Living Stones...

A story is told... on a cold July morning as children moved through the newly complete St Christopher's, Archbishop Thomas Cahill was praying his rosary. A child accosted him, and pointed to the empty windows over the bell tower, on the Franklin street entrance. 'Archbishop, you left out two windows.'" Referring to the two empty window which remaining that position today. To which the Archbishop swiftly responded: "Ah no! Those windows are left for you!"

Indeed, as we commemorate 50 Years, we now as Children of God, turn our Hopes and Joys confidently to the next 50! For we too have been given a Mission to Carry on.

Paul and Barnabas in our first reading, echo this magnificent truth... that God's Word, His Son, is for all... and each Baptised person indeed has been now made "...a light to the nations, ...that Christ's salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

Saint Patrick, whose feast we celebrate today; was *evangelised* and so became the evangeliser. Always founded upon the firm foundation and Christ.

In the Gospel we've just heard – while Jesus rejoices with the disciples, he also warns them against puffing up their chests. They need reminding that every good work – comes from Him. Nothing they do, will ever be on their own.

Perhaps that's a reminder to all of us on this 50th Anniversary of Consecration. It's easy to feel confident when we succeed. It is easy to boast on an occasion such as this. But the glory belongs to God. He has given the past 50 Years, and now He leads us on the road ahead to the next 50!

This Cathedral, glorious in her humility, is a Living Ecclesiology of the Universal Church. As the Eucharistic heart and, under our Archbishop, the sign of Unity – what we really celebrate is the mystery and magnificence of the living Church!

This Cathedral is a sign, in wood and stone that Christ is risen, and that the temple of his body is always growing, as the people of God in pilgrimage, *WALKING TOGETHER*, toward the New Jerusalem.

So friends, as we too glance at these windows above surrounded by the Communion of Saint at each Eucharist... let us to be affirmed and spurred–

Encouraged by the faces which gaze back at us...those of the *totus Christus*; who remind us, that we do not make this Journey alone...

We pray for all who have gathered over the last 50 years (and more), to worship within the walls of this parish Church and Cathedral. In moments of great sorrow and fear; as well as immense joy and awe. In public celebration, and private.

May every pilgrim who visits this place, go forth having experienced the gentle presence and the merciful Heart of the God who walks among us. Of the *Totus Chrisus*... within whom we never walk alone! And may we, in this Year of *Walking Together*, continue to invoke the intercession and protection of Saint Christopher, over our Archdiocese, and all her people, as we continue confidently along the pilgrim way.