

## HOMILY

**ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE  
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN  
SAINTS PETER AND PAUL (OLD CATHEDRAL), GOULBURN  
150 YEAR ANNIVERSARY  
30 NOVEMBER 2022**

The time has finally arrived for the opening of the extensively restored and beloved "Old Cathedral" of Goulburn, as it is affectionately called. Also for the dedication of a new altar mensa. With thanks to Almighty God, we recall this 150-year anniversary since the first opening of Sts Peter and Paul's (November, 1872).

Over these days, when the faithful have inspected this magnificent restoration, one particular word has been used almost universally: beautiful

Let us reflect on the word "beautiful." It is a word applied to this Old Cathedral, St Peter and Paul's, and not to a museum or some majestic government building.

To savour the taste of theological "beauty" in the Church, let us turn to the Holy Scriptures for inspiration.

In the First Reading of today's Mass (Genesis 28/11-18), we find ourselves not at Goulburn but at Bethel in the Holy Land. Jacob is tired. He uses a pillar made of stone and sleeps. He dreams. He has an extraordinary vision of angels going up and down a ladder from Bethel to the Heavens. Bethel has become a meeting place with the heavens. The promises of God's love and closeness are offered to the people. They, in turn, can respond to this grace by offering praises and prayers that ascend into the courts of God.

Jacob wakes up. He reflected on his dream. He comes to understand that he is at a beautiful Holy Place. He exclaims: "Surely, the Lord is in this place, and did not know it" (Genesis 28/16). He plans to anoint the stone, a sign of God's blessings on Bethel. This will give a foundation for a House to God he wants to build.

This beautiful and holy place at Bethel is to be a gathering place for the people of God.

Yet, there is so much more beauty to come. In the Second Reading (1Cor. 10/16-21), St Paul proclaims that the anointed stone upon which God's people gather in "God's home" is none other than the Cross of Jesus Christ. By re-presenting the Death and Resurrection of the Last Supper and Good Friday, Christians "form a single body." The Eucharist makes Christ truly present. All that happens on the altar – and here I include the altar I am about to anoint – becomes "a visible sign of the mystery of the Church." As it were, this "New Bethel" releases the sweet fragrance

of praise “prayers ascending” and the nourishment of the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” descending. It is truly mysterious. Not mysterious in the sense of perplexing, but in the sense that what happens is so deep that the only word that is suitable to be used is that it is totally and completely beautiful. It is Jesus with us Sacramentally.

Due to our own personal histories marked by sin and human fickleness, the Catholic Church over the centuries is made up of sinners seeking conversion and forgiveness from our merciful and loving God. We do this especially in this current liturgical season of Advent. Yet, in our liturgies celebrated in a truly beautiful Church as this one, we believe that the merciful Risen Jesus leads us forward – “Walking Together”, as we are stressing in this year long Archdiocesan focus after the conclusion of the Plenary Council of Australia. As a result, we are beautifully made as the Holy Body of Christ, washed clean by the Blood of the Lamb.

This beauty is not just for us. It is for the entire world – the entire cosmos. It is the beauty of Jesus among us. It is what we propose and not impose on others: It is the intoxicating fragrance of the Holy Spirit offered to all who open their hearts to God.

This beautiful Old Cathedral says all this not in words, but in the serene and consoling architecture surrounding us. In a sense, this beautifully restored parish church evangelises us non-verbally. It suggests and prompts silence, stillness and a simplicity from the tortured and burnt out souls that visit her in the hope of a true way forward in life by “walking together” as one. We are united by simply resting in her beauty, to open our hearts to all that is beautiful, all that is good, and all that is true in life.

Pope Francis speaks to the power of beauty in art and architecture. He suggests they speak of God in ways beyond words. He says, “Expressions of beauty enable us to see the face of God who is Eternal Beauty” (4 August 2017).

Years earlier, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of encountering Jesus via “the way of beauty” (1 August 2011). If we are open to it, we can feel “the Lure of God” through the way of beauty.

Beauty leads us to a religious experience. We spontaneously ask questions that are religious and theological: “Where is this beauty from?”, “what does this beauty reflect?”, “Is the author of beauty, beauty itself (i.e. God).” In other words, through beauty, faith is born.

We see all this happening in today's Gospel. On this Feast of the Apostle Andrew, the Gospel from Matthew situates Andrew with his brother Peter going about their everyday lives as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Then beauty incarnate arrives – Jesus arrives. He calls them to something totally unexpected, something totally new. So strong is the allure of his soul beauty, they “left their nets at once and followed Jesus.” They have been captured by the beauty of God. They are given complete freedom in leaving all and making Jesus their one and only love freshly encountered. After the Resurrection, Andrew (along with his famous brother Peter) become “fishers of peoples” – evangelisers/missionaries to the nations.

Dear friends in Christ, we are not here today simply to “wash nets” and make a beautiful Church even more beautiful. Something greater is at hand – a theological

beauty. We are here to open our hearts to the allure of God present in all this beauty around us.

Sts Peter and Paul's looks to its evangelising future and not simply to its glorious 150 year past. May this sacred place be a "New Bethel" to the good people of Goulburn and beyond. May it be an oasis of beauty in the concrete and steel of our modern world growing tired of false promises and misleading ideologies. May Jesus reign here in the Words proclaimed by the Gospels and Sacraments that make Jesus present in all beauty.

May this place and its surrounds become a beautiful pilgrimage centre that attracts pilgrims to Goulburn from far and wide. Let them leave this place as missionaries, like St Andrew, and say the words of Jacob from their hearts; "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." (Genesis 28/16).