

Homily of Archbishop Philip Wilson

June 29, 2008 – Mass for Feast of Sts Peter and Paul

Gospel Reading Matthew: 16: 13—19

.... when you go to these stadiums they're most extraordinary experiences. One of the innovations that they had devised now is that when you sit in the stadium, on the back of the seat in front of you there's a little menu, you look at the menu and it tells you what's available, you then use your mobile phone and somebody then appears out of nowhere and brings you the food, the beer and the drink that you want. It's a very efficient system. I might add I didn't use it, but I watched others around me doing it.

These two spaces are extraordinary because of the hold that they have on the imagination of the people of New York. But a couple of weeks ago those two spaces became something even more dramatic and the hold that it had upon the imagination of the people of New York became even more profound, because they were the sites of the two major masses with Pope Benedict XVI, when he came to New York on his recent visit. Whatever may be the wonder and power of these spaces because of how they've been hallowed by sport, the experience of the people who went to those masses was completely different. Their focus would not have been on the menus that were on the seats in front of them, but rather on the religious dimensions of the faith that they were celebrating in union with the Pope who was present among them.

His presence, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, is a very important touchstone of this faith in which we believe. So much so, that in the Catholic Church we never celebrate the Eucharist without mentioning the name of the Pope personally in every Eucharistic prayer. There's this incredible bond of faith and love between ourselves and the Pope that was created by Christ when He established the Church and the framework of the life of the Church through the Apostles, and especially through the incredible Ministry of St. Peter and St. Paul in the foundational experience of the Church's life. That Ministry of the Apostles Peter and Paul has been enshrined in history and is alive today in the Ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The Ministry of Peter and Paul, confirming us and strengthening us in our faith and our love, is really closely attached to the Ministry of the Pope. And so in two weeks time when he appears in our midst and we have these wonderful opportunities to be with him, especially in the Eucharists in which he's going to be the chief celebrant in Australia, it is an opportunity for us to renew and deepen our faith.

I noticed yesterday in "The Advertiser" that there was a big article about our expectations, what we would be hoping from the visit of the Pope. I notice as well that Bishop O'Kelly was a major contributor to that article and had lots of good and interesting things to say. But when we speculate about what effect the Pope will have upon us in his presence, it's really important for us to return to the fundamentals of our faith and the fundamentals that Jesus was interested in when He formed the Ministry of Peter and Paul. The fundamental issue for us, and for the Pope when he is here, despite the problems that we face in the Church or the challenges that we have to respond to, despite the obvious difficulties that we experience in living out our faith in Australia today – the fundamental question, which the Pope presents to us is the fundamental question that Jesus asked the Apostles Himself in this incident at Caesare'a Philippi that is recorded in the Gospel today.

The fundamental question for us at all times in our faith, especially in the presence of the Pope and those special times when he is with us is who do we believe that Jesus is, how do we relate to

Jesus in the life of the Church, what place do we put Jesus in – in other words, who do we say that Christ is. And how does that answer issue from the centre of our experience as a disciple of the Lord today and as a member of the Church.

So the fundamental issues that we need to deal with in the presence of the Pope are the ones that we face every day, they're about our conversion, about our pursuit of holiness and about our commitment to love; to love God and to love our neighbour. The presence of the Holy Father in two weeks time is an opportunity for us to reflect upon our faith and examine our conscience, to see what we need to change in our lives that we may be more faithful to the Lord. What do we need to do in order to be more faithful to Christ in our witness to Him as we live in Australia today? Because if we don't attend to the fundamentals, whatever reflections and decisions that we take, reflections that we make, and decisions we take, to ensure a future for the Church, then they will fall short of what it is that the Lord asks of us today. We must base our future upon our commitment to Christ and our commitment to holiness.

So I'd suggest in our mass today, among all the other intentions that we should pray for, we should pray for the intention that when the Pope comes we may be worthy to celebrate our faith with him, and be led by him and his presence and his teaching, to do what it is that we may be more holy and more faithful to the Lord as we live our lives today.

If we accept the challenge of the Gospel and make the changes in our lives that we need to today in order to be more faithful to the Lord, then we will have fulfilled the potential that is there when the Pope comes to our country to lead us in our faith within our own land.

One final point that I'd like to make today is this – today we also start the Jubilee Year of St. Paul, right throughout the Church for the next 12 months, until we celebrate the Feast of Peter and Paul again, we're going to be concentrating upon Paul and his Ministry and especially on his writings, which are such an important part of the New Testament. The reason why we're doing that is that we may be led by Paul in a new way to understand the mystery of Christ and the responsibilities that we have in order to be able to be faithful to the Lord as we live today.

So during this next year in the Archdiocese there will be many occasions, talks, prayer gatherings, reflections about Paul and his writings, and they will be great opportunities for us to reflect upon this. But we must make sure individually that we don't lose the opportunity that's presented to us during this year to get to know Paul and his teachings in a better way. So I have a little suggestion that you might do, and that I might do ... I'd suggest that during this year that we take one of the letters of Paul that's to be found in the New Testament and to read it from beginning to end, not once but five times, so that we may be immersed then in the reality of what Paul teaches. Now, they are of different lengths. Timothy is only a few chapters long, Romans is really big, but I'll leave that up to you to decide how you want to do that. But if you take one of them and read it over five times then I think that will be a really wonderful way of being able to celebrate the reality of faith that we're concentrating on this year dedicated to St. Paul.

And so my brothers and sisters, as always in the Eucharist, we now go to the altar and we bring all of our lives, summed up in the gifts of bread and wine, and we ask the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord, and to change us through the grace of the Holy Spirit so that we may be more like Christ, and that we may be more courageous and more able to answer the question that Jesus puts before us today - "And you, who do you say that I am?"