

Homily of Archbishop Philip Wilson

St. Thomas Apostle

Mass for the Indian Community, July 3, 2008

Gospel Reading John 20: 24 - 29

My sisters and brothers

I have been looking forward to this celebration for a long time, because it is a reminder to me and to you about the way in which our local church is changing and about the new vitality of life that is being brought to it by people who come to this land with the Catholic faith from other countries. Our responsibility now is together to forge a new way of experiencing our Catholic faith as we live together in this country. People who come here from other countries, from different backgrounds, using different languages, are meant to find their place here, not as an oddity to be looked at as though it is something interesting, like in a museum, but rather as brothers and sisters who are to find their rightful place in the experience of being Catholic as we live in the world today.

You and I, for better or for worse, have been brought to life by God in a time of great challenge to the Church. It is a time of worry because of the difficulties that we face as we strive to be the disciples of the Lord and the community of the Lord in the world today. But on the other side, this is also time of great excitement and wonder because of the new things, the new elements of life and of faith which open before us because of the way in which the Lord has led us into these times of change.

A writer who spoke about the Second Vatican Council that was held over forty years ago, said that in many ways it was the first time that the Church ever truly gathered together to celebrate its faith as a representative of all the peoples who lived in the world. Because before the Second Vatican Council, most of the people who gathered together as Bishops to celebrate the Council's of the Church were people who were born, and grew up, in Europe, and in the culture of Europe. By the time that we came to the celebration of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, the nature of the Church had changed and that was reflected as you looked at the faces of the Bishops, the thousands of Bishops, who were gathering together to celebrate that Ecumenical Council. They came from all over the world. In fact some of them who came from very significant communities weren't allowed to come because in China and in the Soviet Union and other parts of the world, the Communists wouldn't let them participate at all because they were determined to make sure that the Church was going to be eliminated.

But here forty years later, we can see how that development which was manifest at the time of the Council has now exploded into a new and wonderful way of being Catholic throughout the world and there are consequences of those changes that affect all of us.

You would be interested to know that until 1969, the Latin Church in the western world celebrated the Feast of St. Thomas on the 21st December. When the universal calendar of the Latin Church was being renewed after the Second Vatican Council, the scholars who reproduced the calendar and introduced the new system, having been influenced by a really good scholarship and historical research, realised that December 21st was not the day to celebrate the Feast of St Thomas. July 3rd was the day because that was the day that was always the significant day on which this feast was celebrated in India and it went right back to the very beginning of the association of the people of India with the faith and the memories

that they had culturally and historically of the presence of Thomas as the first preacher of the Gospel within their land. The elements of that work were elements that they had endured throughout the years and manifested themselves in the unique and wonderful ways in which the people of India celebrated their faith, in a different culture, in different languages, with different liturgical expressions.

And now, we find the experience is that people of India who have been nourished in that faith have been asked by the Lord to carry that faith throughout the rest of the world because of the massive changes that are taking place in our world through Globalisation and the big movements of migration which are what we all experiencing today.

So as Archbishop today, there are two things that I want to say and I want to say them clearly. First of all I want you to recognise yourselves as full members of the local church here in Adelaide. It is not possible in many ways for us to be able to celebrate the Eucharist in this Archdiocese according to the rhythms and the patterns of the liturgies that you may be used to and the culture that you may be used to at home in India. But I want you to know and to feel that you are very welcome here and that your welcome is not one where we welcome you because we think you might be with us for a while, but your welcome is because we recognise the gift that you are to all of us, from God.

Every group of people who come to this land from other countries and other cultures who carry the faith, are God's gift to us. In Australia we have seen this very clearly over and over again, since the Second World War, as a result of the great movements of migration. Initially, it was largely from Europe, but then it began to be something to be experienced from many other lands. For the last twenty years, there has been a tremendous movement of migration into Australia of Catholics who have come from Asia and brought to our experience of faith the wonderful history and background and experience that they have had in being Catholic in their home lands.

So, I want you to understand that we welcome you as partners and we are honestly hoping that in that partnership that your faith will enrich ours and that especially, the faith that you share and experience within your families will be able to be of great influence through the rest of our community that we might learn from you about what it is to be Catholic and living in the world today because of the rich ways that you experience that within your own families and in your own expression of faith.

The second point that I would like to make is this, I hope that in a hundred years time, that when we gather in the Cathedral, I shouldn't say "we" because you might be here, but I won't. When the community gathers to celebrate the Feast of St Thomas, here in the Cathedral, in a hundred years, that people will look back to this time, when we began, and will recognise the great richness that has become part of the life of the Archdiocese because of the commitment that you and I make together, to influence the life of our community through the expression of our faith today.

The Lord wants us to be saints, and to influence the church and the world by the quality of our holiness. I know that your experiences, like mine, that we are marked by human weakness and we must continually ask the Lord to forgive us and make new starts in our discipleship of the Lord. But the stakes of what we are involved in, as we do that today, go far beyond the personal dimensions of our lives and have a big role to play in the way in which, the church in Australia is going to be strengthened and developed and grow, as we move towards the future.

In a very short time Pope Benedict XXVI will be in our country and we will have the opportunity at World Youth Day, a chance in this country to pray fervently to the Lord in union with Him, present among us, for the graces and the help that we need to be more faithful to the Lord as we live today.

As we celebrate the Feast of St Thomas today, our special prayers should be that the depth of our faith will be like He is. That we will be willing to recognise, in Christ, Our Lord and Our God and like Thomas that we will be able to recognise Him in the midst of the struggles and the doubts that we go through in our daily life. "I don't believe it", he said, "Unless I see Him and unless I do this and that, then I am not going to believe". Well, he did see and he believed, and he made the clearest statement of belief in Jesus, as God, which is to be found in the whole of the New Testament. But when the Lord stood in front of him and he came to recognise Him, he prefaced their reading with the words that always characterised the meetings that the Lord had with people after His resurrection. And those words always were, "Peace be with you".

As we celebrate our faith tonight, in this Mass, the risen Lord stands before all of us and says to us quite clearly, "Peace be with you". And our only response can be the response of Thomas and for us all to say from our heart, "My Lord and my God".