

Clergy Jubilarians Mass 2025

Homily:

Fr Wally Tudor

Today as we celebrate the Feast of the Apostles, Simon and Jude, it is appropriate to include the Golden Jubilees of Bishop Paul, Fr Eugene, Fr Michael Delaney, Fr Michael Morley and myself as well as the extraordinary 65 years of Fr Pat (affectionally known as Flags).

It is a time of deep gratitude and reflection for the many years of the gift of the Ministry of the Priesthood: Gratitude to parents, family, friends, fellow priests and parishioners of our parish assignments who have supported us through thick and thin. It is a journey taken over a long period of preparation.

I am reminded of the context of today's Gospel according to Luke. Jesus chooses twelve from his 72 disciples to form his leadership team for evangelisation after a whole night of prayer and discernment - an important prerequisite for a whole new way of being that would form the soon to be established Christian Community.

He had already prepared the 72 by sending them out in twos to prepare the people for evangelisation, which he would follow through at a later date. Now he was moving twelve of these men to a deeper preparation in light of the new era that was about to begin.

He intensified his teaching of the Twelve over the next months with his priorities of forgiveness, compassion, kindness, justice and charity with a preferential option for the poor in the persons of the widow, orphan and stranger in their midst. How many months of this intense preparation Jesus shared with the Twelve we do not know, but the importance is the intensity of this time for his mission.

On the night before he died, Holy Thursday night, Jesus celebrated his Last Supper with the Twelve Apostles, whom he now called his friends, at which he instituted the Holy Eucharist and the Ministerial Priesthood. To this day it is a sadness for me that the celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Holy Thursday is not considered by many the great celebration of the Institution of the Eucharist and the Ministerial Priesthood as it should be.

Two thousand years later, with historical and cultural contextual changes, the Ministerial Priesthood remains significant and the Eucharist the centre of our communal worship.

Our preparation for the Priesthood took many years, seven for most of us and more for some. The seminary formation was a time of bonding and studies, learning how to relax and how to overcome obstacles, a time for discernment and hopefully reaching clarification about what our future lives would be about.

Even before seminary life and indeed thinking about a vocation, I was introduced by a friend to St Jude, the Saint of hopeless cases, in the hope of passing exams that would get me through to the seminary. Little did I know that St Jude would carry me through the challenges of seminary life and discernment. Poor old St Simon, even though he was called the Zealot, never got a look-in at the time. Even as we know little about their ministries and the form of their martyrdom, we call upon their blessings today as members of the Twelve, the first group of priests in the Christian Church.

There's another Jubilee the whole Church has been celebrating over the last year, the one held every twenty-five years, called by the late Pope Francis and sustained by Pope Leo. Named PILGRIMS OF HOPE, it is about the Hope we have in Jesus, the God of our salvation, the hope we need in a world divided by poverty, violence, hatred and exclusivity. As we continue our pilgrimage in God's creative world, leaving the lightest footprint and the hope that each of us in our own way will chastise the greed, selfishness, vengefulness and power grab by our actions of love, justice, compassion, kindness and forgiveness.

Reflections of Jubilee celebrations must always lead to Hope - to make Christ's Church a sign of service to others rather than an edifice of power - a sign, rather, of the very truth of God's Incarnation among us in Jesus to show us the strength of the best in humanity.

In the magic of the mystery of the Church we have another Apostle of the Lord, not included among the Twelve, St Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles and the most prolific of the Scriptures writers, an Apostle fervent in his embrace of Christ and equally impatient to evangelise the Gentiles as he is to meet his maker through the grace of martyrdom.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, the first reading in today's celebration, we are all citizens like all the saints and part of God's household, part of the building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Jesus Christ himself for its main cornerstone.

It is in this context that I want to share with you the experience of my first funeral in the Cathedral of St Michael in Iligan City, Mindanao, Philippines. As was the custom I was called over to the church for a funeral blessing. Mostly it was just the blessing; the family handled the burial themselves. As I arrived in the Cathedral, I found a group of people, obviously poor, with children with sores on their legs, and adults, mainly men, who

seemed uncomfortable in the edifice that was the Cathedral, but no coffin in sight until I looked down on the ground and saw a shoe box neatly wrapped in brown paper, with a lovely bow tied around it just like a gift. It was the remains of a still-born, gift-wrapped and returned to God, not in anger but in thanksgiving that they were able to offer as a sacrifice the baby who never breathed but came from God and is returned to God in humble thanksgiving.

At that moment I asked myself, "Have I come to evangelise or to be evangelised?" Priesthood is service and not power. It is evangelisation every which way.

Wind the clock forward and here I am ministering in Ballarat, a familiar place, the city I was born in and educated in from grade six at St Alipius to Matriculation at St Patrick's College. I received a very friendly welcome in 1986 as a Columban and fitted in easily from my point of view.

I arrived at a time of great distress when the church was rocked by clergy abuse after clergy abuse, not only here in our diocese but throughout the universal church. It was a time of great distress for the victims of abuse who were getting knock back after knock back, as the institutional church response was to protect its finances rather than support the victims of the horrible crimes.

It was a great distress for our congregations and for our priests, as the press gave us such a hard time as the institutional church because it failed the victims of abuse. My prayer is for the peaceful and safe life of those victims still alive and eternal peace for those who didn't make it and for the families left to struggle with the consequences of a church that let them down, when it should have been there for them.

As we celebrate our Jubilees tonight, I am aware of the fact that we have come a long way towards making progress for a better response to the needs of victims of abuse and other forms of violence towards the most vulnerable in our midst - a progress made possible by bishops, priests and laity working together in a synodal way, recognising that we need each other's wisdom and response to any difficulty arising from our human condition that is not part of the incarnational humanity that Jesus has shown us by his life, suffering and death.

We are not priests in our own right, we have been called to serve, to serve the communities to which we have been called. We do not simply have power over our congregations, but share with them the burdens of administration and the joys of pastoral care. I'm sure I speak for my fellow priests when I say thank you to all those in the various parishes who have taken up their baptismal call to share in the mission of the Church to make Christ known to all with whom they come in contact with each day of their lives.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ come down upon each and every one of us as we respond to the call of our Baptism that invites, challenges, us to hear the call to come and see what God has in store for us in his mission of salvation.

For we are PILGRIMS OF HOPE on a journey of faith to the fullness of God's Truth.

Ad multos annos, my fellow jubilarians.