



Pentecost Sunday, 2018

Homily

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday 20 May 2018

This year the Feast of Pentecost which we celebrate today, marks the beginning of a very important event in the life of the Church in Australia. Today, we formally begin the journey towards a Plenary Council for the whole Church in Australia. This journey will culminate in two gatherings, one in Adelaide in October of 2020 and another, probably in Sydney, in May of 2021. While this initiative is being officially launched today throughout the nation, here in our archdiocese we will solemnly inaugurate it next Saturday evening during the Vigil Mass for the Feast of the Holy Trinity. On the following Sunday, the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, I have asked that each parish begin its own local journey. It is my hope, too, that every one of our other Catholic communities, from our schools to our hospitals, and from our many prayer groups to our social outreach agencies, will also gather to formally recognise their part in this great journey.

We will all hear a great deal in the coming weeks and months about the Plenary Council and those who are interested will be able to access more information immediately by logging on to the Plenary Council website, which goes "live" today. In simple terms a Plenary Council is a solemn gathering of all the Catholic bishops of a region, in our case of the whole of Australia, to prayerfully discern what God is asking of his Church at this time in our history. Of course, for the bishops to do this, we will need to listen to the wisdom of all God's people, for the Holy Spirit whose coming at Pentecost we celebrate today speaks to all the members of the Church when we are open to his presence in our lives. Over the next twelve months there will be opportunities for all of us who care about the Church to share our hopes and dreams together. It is this sharing of hopes and dreams, based on our prayerful listening to the voice of God's Spirit speaking in our lives and in our hearts, which will guide the bishops as they seek to be the humble servants and shepherds of God's Church.

Many of you will remember that in 2012, we lived together the experience of the Year of Grace. It was a time in which we were all encouraged to follow the advice given to the Church by Saint John Paul II, who insisted that the Church would never be all that God was calling it to be until we began to contemplate the face of Christ and begin afresh from him, placing him where he belonged: at the heart of our lives and at the heart of the Church. Only then would we be able to be the bearers of God's love bringing the light, strength and wisdom of Christ to a world which is often dark, enfeebled and confused.

The paradox is, of course, that we who are called and commissioned through our baptism and confirmation to be these signs and bearers of Christ's presence and grace in our world are ourselves so often stumbling and confused as we struggle with the darkness of our own lives. As individual Christian disciples and as the Catholic community of faith we can no longer be blind to the many



ways in which we have in the past and continue now to be so much less than the Lord needs us and is calling us to be. How can we respond to the needs of others when we are so needy ourselves? How can we heal others when we are ourselves wounded?

We are not the first to feel this way. The apostles who gathered together in Jerusalem with Mary the mother of Jesus and with a wider group of his disciples on the first Pentecost Sunday (cf. Acts 1:14) had in a sense “lost” Jesus. After the bitter trauma of their Lord’s crucifixion and death, and then the undreamt of renewal of all their hopes in their encounter with the risen Lord, they had to see him taken from their sight again as he ascended to his Father in heaven. They must have thought they would never see him again. They must have wondered how they would continue on without his sustaining presence. Certainly their minds and hearts must have been filled with all that the risen Lord had shared with them, and certainly, too, their hopes must have been raised by his promise to send them “another Advocate, the Holy Spirit” (cf. John 14:26). But what could talk of this Holy Spirit mean to those who had not yet received this gift? What sense could they be expected to make of the promise of the men in white robes as Jesus ascended to heaven that “*this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go*”? (Acts 1:11). The first community of Jesus’ disciples, as they gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem, must have been as confused and as hopeful as Christians have always been as they, as we, ponder the paradox of the Lord’s seeming absence and, at the same time his mysterious presence, in our lives and wonder how we are to respond.

Perhaps it was the very combination of confusion, of doubt and of expectant hope which made that small gathering of believers open to the gift which God was about to pour out on them. After all those who believe they have all the answers already will not be able to recognise their need for the gift of the Spirit. As the Gospels continually remind us, it is those who, like Simon Peter, recognise their need for forgiveness and renewal who are able to welcome the gift when it is offered. Those instead who are locked in their own self-righteousness, like some of the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ time, have hard hearts which close them off to the healing power of God’s love.

God has brought his Church into existence so that it can be a living and life-giving sign of the presence of Christ among us still today as our saviour, our healer, our shepherd; as the Way for us to follow, the Truth to which we can entrust ourselves, and the source of Life which is ours in Christ. Our faith is always a gift and a mission. The love of God which we receive and recognise in and through our life in the Church is a love we are called to share with others.

The Plenary Council journey, which we inaugurate today, can lead us, together, to become all that the Lord needs us to be. May the precious Gift of the Holy Spirit, whose coming at Pentecost we remember today, be poured out on the Church in great abundance. May we all be open to receive this gift with gratitude and embrace it with joy and hope.