



**Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord
Launch of Second Phase, 2020 Plenary Council**

Homily

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**Sunday 2 June, 2019
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

I am now sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.

With these words Jesus invites us into the mystery of today's celebration, his ascension to his Father in Heaven, by linking it to what we will celebrate next Sunday, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christian community gathered in prayer. In linking these two events, the Ascension and Pentecost, Jesus also invites us to see them as the outflowing, according to the Father's plan, of the great Easter mystery: the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.

It is impossible to catch the depths of this great mystery in just a few words but perhaps a beginning might sound something like this. Through his life, death and resurrection Jesus frees us from the power of sin and enables us by his grace to receive this gift of salvation. In his ascension to his Father in Heaven Jesus takes his rightful place in the kingdom of his Father and in doing so prepares a place for us so that where he is we too might also be. In a unity of love with his Father, he sends the gift of the Holy Spirit to his community, the Church, so that the Spirit might lead the community to the fullness of the truth and remind them of all that Jesus said and did. In the great mystery of God's free decision we find ourselves numbered among those who, in this archdiocese, in this state and in this country of Australia, are the inheritors and beneficiaries of this great gift of the Holy Spirit who, from his first sending by the Father and the Son, has been leading the Church into the fullness of the truth and reminding the Church, that is reminding us, of all that Jesus said and did.

What this means, it seems to me, is that we today, in communion with that first community gathered in prayer and in hope in Jerusalem, in communion with God's faithful people throughout the last two thousand years who in their own time and place strove to listen and respond to the voice of the Spirit, and in communion with our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church spread right across the face of the earth, are called to the same task: to open our minds and our hearts to the power of the Spirit who continues to breathe among us leading us always into the fullness of the truth and reminding us of all that Jesus said and did.



This for me explains why the bishops of Australia took the surprising and courageous decision to convene a Plenary Council of the Church in Australia, to have at the heart of our preparations for the Council the question so many of you have been pondering – *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* – and to make some words from the Book of Revelations – *Listen to what the Spirit is saying* – the key theme and driving force of the long process of preparation for the Council, whose formal sessions will be held in October next year and in May of 2021.

Today, in our Archdiocese, we are marking an important moment in this journey. The initial “Listening and Dialogue” stage of the Council has concluded. We have received responses from over 220,000 people across the country and of course, as you would expect, there are many different, inspiring, hopeful, yearning, and sometimes divergent and conflicting, voices emerging. As the Church in Australia we now have the vital and challenging task of trying to catch the voice of God speaking in and through the voices of his people. It is this to which we now, as the People of God, need to turn. It is this which those overseeing the work of the Council have called the “Listening and Discernment” stage of our preparations. If the “Listening and Dialogue” stage was an invitation to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, so too, and even more so, is this new stage of discernment. As I reflect on the words of Jesus in today’s gospel about the coming of the Holy Spirit in power it seems to me that this is both a complex and an exciting challenge.

Firstly we are being called to let the Holy Spirit remind us of all that Jesus said and did. We are a community of disciples of Jesus. It is Jesus who is our Way and our Truth and our Life. Fidelity to his Way and his Truth and his Life, especially as found in the inspired pages of the Gospel, must govern all we say and do.

We are also being called to live out of the richness of the Church’s journey over two thousand years as the Holy Spirit has been leading us ever more into the fullness of the truth. As we listen to God speaking to us through the pages of the gospels, and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we will also need to listen to God speaking to us through the story of his journeying with his Church over two millennia.

We are also being called to listen to what the bishops at the Second Vatican Council called “*the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age*”. The good news of Jesus Christ has the power to respond to every anxiety and every hope of our brothers and sisters in the faith, and to all people everywhere. Whether as the Church of Christ we have yet managed to find a way to share this message of life in a way that can be understood and appreciated is an urgent question. And to the extent that we haven’t to that extent we may well have to recognise that we have not been truly open to the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Fidelity to Jesus Christ, the face of the God of mercy, made known to us in the pages of the gospel; fidelity to the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit through the long life of the Church and



still today, leading us into the fullness of the truth; and fidelity to the people of our own time who have a right to have the gospel of hope preached to them in a way that they can understand: this is the goal of the Plenary Council. As we enter now into this crucial moment of listening and deep discernment, as we try to “catch” the voice of God speaking in and through the voices of his people, I want to ask you this morning to play your part, especially through prayer and also where possible through engagement with the process of discernment, so that our community of faith, just like the first community gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost, will wait in prayer and expectation for the power from on high, the Holy Spirit, who will lead us into the fullness of the truth and remind us of all that Jesus said and did.