

Introduction to Plenary 2020
All Saints Parish
26/27 January, 2019

In today's second reading, Paul teaches us about what is perhaps at the centre of his theology. All of us are now Christ's body on earth. If Jesus' mission is to continue, we, filled with his Spirit, are going to be the ones who have to do it.

Paul uses the analogy of the human body:

- A body is one though many parts
- All parts important
- No part deserves more honour
- You are Christ's body
- We were all given the one Spirit at baptism
- All with your own gifts

Pope Francis has spoken of the need to engage in the world and respond in faith. He said:

“Our previous ways of explaining the world and relationships, good and bad, no longer appears to work. The way in which we locate ourselves in history has changed. Things we thought would never happen, or that we never thought we would see, we are experiencing now, and we dare not even imagine the future. That which appeared normal to us – family, the Church, society and the world – will probably no longer seem that way. We cannot simply wait for what we are experiencing to pass, under the illusion that things will return to being how they were before.”

So we must ask, how do we now live as the body of Christ in this crazy materialistic, secular world? Today's gospel gives us a clue:

Jesus opened the scroll and said, “The Spirit of God is upon me.”

- Because of baptism we all have the whisper of the Spirit in us
 - We have been anointed
 - Prophet and priest
 - Made holy
 - Strengthened
 - We have been anointed to bring
 - Good news to the poor
 - liberty to prisoners
 - Sight to the blind
 - Freedom to the oppressed
 - A year of favour

It hardly feels like a Year of Favour in our Church here in Australia, and in many other parts of the world for that matter. The Catholic Church has suffered badly through the Royal Commission and the atrocities which it illuminated. We have been wounded, betrayed, disgusted, embarrassed, frustrated, angered. Many of us have lost faith. Some are hanging on by a thread. Many are calling for change: Let's start with the role of women in the church. Where do I begin? Others ask if a celibate priesthood is necessary. Or how can the church be relevant in a secular society? Some want to get rid of guitars in Mass and bring back chant. What more can the Church do about social justice issues, like the treatment of refugees and asylum seeker. There will be things that concern you, for sure. As St Paul said, if one part of the body is hurt, the whole body hurts.

Well, Pope Francis is an unusual Pope who is bringing real change to the Church by encouraging open discussion and refusing to silence dissent. Francis is patient and wants people to speak their minds because he believes in a synodal church. A synodal church listens to the Holy Spirit by listening to the people who are the church, the *sensus fidelium*, albeit with its great diversity and conflicting perspectives. The *sensus fidelium*, is “the faithful’s sense of the faith”, a gift we received at baptism. Divine revelation is given, not just to the hierarchy, but to the whole church. Francis trusts that the Holy Spirit will guide us in the right direction.

And in response to this, the Australian Bishops have taken a leap of faith and called for a Plenary Council so that we can dialogue about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia. And what exactly is a Plenary Council, I hear you ask.

A Plenary Council is the highest formal gathering of all local churches in a country. And it has the authority to make church laws on the results of its discernment. Of course, some laws can be addressed locally and some need to go to Rome. We can talk about that more in our listening sessions. Although in the end it will be the bishops who will vote on any future directions for the church in Australia, they will be making those decisions in the light of a long listening to the Holy Spirit speaking through the voices of any of the faithful who wish to speak around Australia. This makes the Plenary Council 2020 different from the last one in 1937. Everyone has a chance to participate and to express whatever the Spirit is saying to them.

Timeline for P2020:

June 18- Mar 19	Listening and Dialogue Encounters
Mar19-May 20	Data analysis, consultation, draft Council Docs
June-Sept 20	Feedback & Sharing: This is what has been heard, this is the next steps...
11-17 OCT, 2020	PLENARY COUNCIL SESSION #1
JAN-APR	Consultation + Feedback on PC#1 + Finalising Documents
MAY 2021	PLENARY COUNCIL SESSION #2

The Council will be held in two sessions in order to enable to deeper discernment, further learning, dialogue and listening where it may be needed and to write or rewrite anything in response to the dialogue of the first session.

So back to the Australian bishops and Plenary 2020, which asks the whole body of Christ the question: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? And they really want to know what all of us think. I know it’s easy to be cynical and think, Why bother?

Well, we bother because as St Paul keeps reminding us, we are the body of Christ and we’ve gotta bother. If we don’t, then what happens? I wonder if we’ve been having a Kodak moment in the Church. We’ve always done it this way and that’s why we keep doing it this way.

But do we want to be Kodak or Apple?

- Kodak invented the first digital camera in 1975 but wouldn’t develop it because it would take away from the sale of film
- **So much invested in film**
- “We developed the world's first consumer digital camera but we could not get approval to launch or sell it because of fear of the effects on the film market.” Don Strickland, a former vice-president.
- In 1976, Kodak sold 90 per cent of the photographic film in the US and 85 per cent of the cameras;
- 2012 files for bankruptcy

- Kodak scared of change

At Apple, Steve Jobs – thrived on change

- “You have to start with the customer experience and work back towards the technology, not the other way around.”

Is it time to start thinking like this in the Church?

- What are the people telling us about their experience and what can we do about it?
- This is what P2020 is doing.

Luckily, Vat II veered more towards the Apple way of thinking than the Kodak. It urged the church to be attentive to the movements of God present in the flow of history, by attending to “the signs of the times. God, who spoke in the past, “continues to converse” with the church (*Dei Verbum*, 8). Revelation didn’t stop 2000 years ago. Through our Plenary Council 2020, the Catholic Church hopes to enter more intensely into that divine-human dialogue.

Therefore, the Plenary team chose a quote from Revelation as our inspiration: Listen to what the Spirit is saying.

And where is the Spirit? Jesus told us that the Spirit is upon me! And you! And you! And you! So the first step of the Plenary process is Listening and Dialogue. This is about to get under way in our parish. Please know that each person’s perspective will be valued. No individual has an infallible sense of the faith. We only have a sense of what God is wanting by allowing as many as possible to have a voice in the conversation God wants to have with the church. Singly we see a special viewpoint; together we see much more. We can become a “synodal” Church – a Church of faith-filled people who speak boldly and with passion, and who listen deeply with an open and humble heart.

I thought I’d give the last word to that ‘meddling priest’, as Paul Keating called him, Frank Brennan SJ. “What we need is a listening and inclusive Church — a Plenary Council at which the clergy and the laity have a proper place at the table, at which the voices of the ‘rusted-on’ and the ‘cheesed-off’ Catholics are heard and at which the bishops are respectfully listening as much as speaking.”

And so, I warmly invite every one of you to come to our Listening and Dialogue sessions. These are open to everyone: Catholic or not. Church attending or not. Rusted-on or cheesed off.

- Wednesday February 13 at 7pm & Thursday February 14 at 10am.
- Wednesday February 20 at 7pm & Thursday February 21 at 10am.
- Wednesday February 27 at 7pm & Thursday February 28 at 10am.

Visit the National website for more background information. [*Plenary Council 2020 Home*](#)

You can come to one or all or anything between. We do not need to come to any consensus. We can submit all comments and ideas. There are the usual sign on sheets on the table at the door of the church. It would help with planning if I knew more or less how many people to expect, but you are very welcome to just turn up. You can also put your submission in the box on the table near the door. Or go to the P2020 website and submit your response. Contact Anne if you have questions:

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I know the Spirit hovers over All Saints and whispers, sings and shouts to our hearts. I’d love to know what she’s saying to you!