



Synodality and Listening & Discernment

Speech

**Very Rev Fr Vincent Glynn
Episcopal Vicar for Education and Faith Formation**

**Saturday 23 September, 2023
Newman College Auditorium**

Most of you, of course, have received a few letters from me over the last few months, and I must say, I am really pleased to see you all here in front of me.

When the names came in the list was given to me, it was good to see many parishes and agencies and various works of the Archdiocese respond.

I think it is a day full of great promise for our Archdiocese, as Archbishop mentioned, and that will be what we are doing today, really is beginning this journey together in the spirit.

I want to speak about this listening and discernment process, because by now you should have gathered that, this really is the core of what we are doing, that we are gathering as a local church, this year in this formation process, to listen and discern how the Holy Spirit or what the Holy Spirit is calling our Archdiocese here in Perth to in relation to a Diocesan Pastoral Council.

So, as I say, at its core, the objective of the Assembly is to listen. That has come through clearly already, but to listen as the people of God, those of us who are baptised, showing in those three officers that Archbishop Tim talked about, and we are gathering to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church of Perth but also, to us gathered here this morning.

And what the Holy Spirit is going to say to us in the next nine or so months, as we lead up to the big assembly on the 13 July 2024, which might seem a way away, but, given how fast this year has gone, it will be here before we know it.

Now, how are we going to do this listening and discernment? Well, it is important that we see that it is based on the Ignatian method of Discernment, which I will talk to you about as we go through. As the Archbishop mentioned, it is a process used at the Plenary Council here in Perth, which some of us are familiar with it. But you know, I think we should be very proud that

the Australian church has taken this model to the Synod of Bishops in Rome. It is a great honour for us.

So, we are going to engage as a group today, as a community, as the people of God today, in an example, an expression of listening and discernment.

So how do we do this listening and discernment? Well, as my notes, say, my slides say up there, we're going to do so by listening together, listening together, to the Word of God, given to us in Scripture, the living tradition of the Church that has been handed down to us, and then by listening to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

So, you will hear there I have mentioned several times the word Listen, and we are asking that we LISTEN to the Spirit, helping us to show us the way. Listening means that we open our ears, we open our minds, and we also open our hearts. When we listen, it also means that we have this ability to discern as a community because when we are listening, we hear or we feel different things, we might notice things that get in the way, our own priorities, our own needs, our own anxieties.

So, what this process means, I think it has been mentioned already, we have to humble ourselves, and to get rid of what I think people should be saying, what I think I should be hearing and entering our heart to the gift of the Spirit being given to us and expressed to us through the word of God. In every sense, we need to bring to this experience, this discerning process, but we must acknowledge them and let them go. So, some of us might already be thinking, I wish they had said this, we have got this problem here, it is time to let that go, and they may come to the fore later on in our discernment but at this stage, we are being called to kind of empty ourselves in humility, to this Word of God, and how this Word of God speaks to us.

So, we need to be in our groups, open minded, to be honest with ourselves and with others, to let go of our own ideas, perhaps importantly, to take the others at our table seriously, to affirm their value and their dignity, the value of who they are, the experience they bring, and to rejoice each other's gifts and talents. I think as the Archbishop said, we have all been baptised, we have all received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Church, through the Archbishop is giving us, this responsibility, that we use these gifts of the Spirit today, not just in our lives, but particularly today in this discernment process. So, this listening and discernment then means that we as an assembly gather together, we become a listening church. There are two things I want to say here, we are going to listen as individuals to the Word of God, but we are also going to be listening as a church, the Body of Christ, those of us who are baptised. So, it is not just individual listening. It is also listening to the Church, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are at our table, or who will talk to you today. But also, of course, later in our local parish communities.

So, we are called in a way to step outside our own pastoral concerns, and we have got lots of them I am sure, to stop and to listen, to stop and to listen, to listen to the spirit in adoration and prayer. I think our prayer this morning from the Liturgy Office, talking about the Spirit,

enabled us to begin that process very clearly, to stop, to listen to the spirit in adoration and prayer. The other thing is that this listening and discernment is grounded in synodal listening, and what I mean by this is that the church as a sign is a sacrament of communion. The Gospels tell us when two or three gather in my name, I am present.

Christ is present here with us now, just by virtue of this gathering, and we are a sacrament, a sign to the others in the world, to our own Archdiocese, to others in our parish communities, of communion. We come here in communion. We do not come here to fight, we do not come here to kind of impose our own ideas, we come here as a communion, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are called to listen and discern where the Holy Spirit is at work in each of us.

So, what I want to say is that from today, and over the next, you know, eight or nine months, however long it is till July next year, that we are accompanying each other. Pope Francis is very big on this idea of accompanying, we are walking with each other, accompanying each other, journeying in together led by the Spirit, and this is just the start. The Archbishop mentioned it started a long time ago and that is true for the early church. This notion of synodality is very strong in the early church, where people often went back to the apostles for guidance and brought the concerns of local communities to the apostles.

So, we are beginning a journey that began in the beginning of the church, but we also beginning this journey together in this Archdiocese. Notice, it is a journey. Today we're taking the first steps, it will be step by step, week, by week, month by month, and we don't do it alone. We do it together. And we do it led by the Spirit. We don't do it on our own accord. Following our own vision. We do it being led by the Spirit. And that calls for an openness to the Spirit. So, the focus in this listening and discernment, as you probably already picked up, is this and I have taken this from Pope Francis in one of his homilies for the feast in the Angels in 2022 at the Angelus because I thought was quite an important phrase.

He says the Word of God is the beacon, the beacon is alive that shows us the way that guides the synodal and our assembly journey. The Word of God, the scriptures are a beacon, is the light that shows our way in the darkness, that leads us on this journey together. As we strive to listen to each other, with attention, and turn to discernment, we need to really see that what we are focusing on is this word of God leading us. It is not about conducting an inquiry into our own opinions but discerning the word. And so today, my friends, we gather to listen to the Word of God to begin that journey, but also to listen, and to see this Holy Spirit as a beacon, leading us along the way.

The Word of God, when we pray, and reflect, and listen to the power of the Spirit, working in our hearts, working in our minds, working within each other, working within us as the people of God in Perth, will lead us to discernment, will bring to the surface in us where the Holy Spirit is guiding us and leading us to. So, this word of God really, is at the heart of this discernment process, it brings to light that process. We all know what discernment is, it is listening to the spirit, within our hearts, within our minds, and from those around us, from the wisdom of the truth of the church, all kinds of things leading into this spirit, guiding us and as I say, here, as Pope Francis speaking not me, it said, it guides the Assembly, preventing it from becoming a

church convention, a study group, or a political gathering, a parliament, but this, a grace filled event, a process guided by the Spirit of grace event.

When I was teaching theology, I understood there could be a complete course on Grace. I most always put Grace simply as what God does for us. How God intervenes in our lives, how God becomes part of our lives and so this discernment is really for us something deeply spiritual, for our own spirituality. It can become a grace-filled moment for us in our own personal faith journey, as we begin this process, guided by the Spirit. And as a good Sacramental Theologian, I cannot let this go by. This listening and discernment really is about our understanding, as Catholics and as Christians, that God is not a remote being, as I would say to my students, sometimes they would tell me they see God as floating on a cloud up there in heaven, who stoops down occasionally and does things.

We believe that God is omnipotent, that God is present. This listening and discernment process comes from that understanding that God is as close to us as our breath. That when we gather, God is present with us. And that God communicates with us, we believe in a God who can be known, and that we can know and knows us. This discernment process highlights that. It's really important to see this - some of you might be feeling a bit inadequate and thinking about what the big task is. Remember, you've received the Holy Spirit in baptism. And remember that God is always present with us, as close to us as our breath. And the Word of God is important because the True Word of God is Jesus Christ himself, who shows us who the Father is, and who shows us what it means to be a disciple.

At our table, we took up that point from the Archbishop that all of us are disciples, the followers of Jesus. We need to have confidence in ourselves in that. So the protagonist of this assembly, and our future gathering next July, and the protagonists of the plenary cancel, the protagonist of the Synod, is clearly the Holy Spirit. When I was thinking about this, I often refer back to the Pentecost story. And, you know, before the ascension, the disciples and apostles gathered in the room petrified, didn't know what to do. This man who had so much promise was dead, buried, He rose from the dead, but what are we doing next? The Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were transformed. And if you read the texts in Acts, Peter goes out immediately and proclaims the Kerygma, begins to teach about Jesus, the Holy Spirit transformed those apostles, and gave them the courage to go out into a hostile environment, and to preach the gospel. That same Holy Spirit has been given to you and I, not a lesser version, it's exactly the same Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is giving you and I the courage to enter into this listening and discernment process. But we're called to listen with the ear of the heart. This to me is quite important. So today, when we go through the action of discernment, we're going to hear the scripture. And I guess the question is not to intellectualise it, but to listen to it in the depth of our being. Someone at our table mentioned that it requires listening with a kind of intimacy, of listening to how we listen to a friend or someone that we love.

So, we LISTEN to the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, we listen to God, in His reflection, this quietness and this stillness. And I want to stress that it's important that we enter into this period, we go into it after lunch, in this period of reflection, quietness and stillness. The other thing that's important is that I said that we listen to the experience of the others at our table. We have to trust the experience of the person on our table, the others at our table, in their

experience of the word. We have to trust the Spirit is working through them, just as the Spirit is working through you and I, that involves, I guess, a humility sometimes, but also an honoring of the Spirit present, in the people that are speaking, we're called to listen in a non-judgmental way. We could say it's calling for humility. This with the openness of the heart, of the mind and the heart. And also, to be mindful that God or the spirit often speaks through the least. Pope Francis mentioned this just recently, in one of his homilies, God often speaks through the least, and sometimes the most unexpected people. So, we need to be attuned to that. And then, of course, we need to listen to the group. So that individual discernment for ourselves, the discernment of the brothers at their table, but then the discernment that comes from this larger group.

So, what we're going to be discerning, this listening and discernment that we're going to be taken through this afternoon, which will form the basis that we remember some formation after this as well, but will form the basis particularly of our assembly in July next year. So, there are these seven steps we're going to be taken through this afternoon to give us an experience of listening and discernment. And there'll be things Angela's McCarthy is going to lead us through that.

So, I just want to look at the steps you can see even just in the headings, gather and pray, reflect, share and listen, share and listen, share and listen. Respond. We can see this whole thing of sharing but also listening to each other and listening to the power of the Spirit. The voice of the Spirit.

So, the question that we're going to be looking at this afternoon to discern is this; and it's slightly different from what they're going to discern in July; but it gives us a chance.

"As we look towards the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council, how can we - meaning us here today - not the DPC hasn't started yet, how can we here today be an authentic expression of synodality?"

That question will be very much in our hearts and minds when we discern this afternoon.

So, what are these seven steps that I've been asked to mention? Well, the first one is listening to the Word of God. We're going to have a piece of scripture proclaim to us. We're called to listen quietly and reflectively to open our minds and hearts to the Spirit. And we're going to be asked to ask ourselves, How is God speaking to me in this scripture text? Take note? How is God speaking to me? Not to the church, not to the person beside you. But how is God speaking to me in this text? What phrases are you being drawn to and why? This first step is very, very prayerful, and very reflective, listening with our mind and our heart, to this word of God. Then we have what's called the spiritual conversations, where we share and listen, each been speaking for roughly two minutes if you if you want to, you can. And you start by saying in my prayer today, I feel no one else speaks. You just say in this prayer, I feel this, the Spirit is speaking to me this way. It might be a phrase that jumped out to you might be a sentence. And then the whole group reflects on that. So, no one's been no discussion, you're just listening to the Spirit working in each other. Once you've done that, we then have this whole group once again, reflecting in silence, reflecting in silence. And we say, What am I hearing

the Holy Spirit's saying to us? So, we begin to move to that different level, what do we hear the Holy Spirit's saying to us at our table.

We then have the spiritual conversations, where we once again listen and share in the group. And again, to come together to say, listening to the Holy Spirit through the voice of this group I've heard, so and again, to bring together what we've heard each other table saying, and where that might be leading me because the Holy Spirit's speaking to the Word of God to us, but he's also speaking through those at our table, our brothers sisters in baptism at the table. So we need to hear what the Holy Spirit might be saying through them, and how it leaves you feeling. And then once again, we have this reflection, five minutes reflection, it can save us enormous amount of time, in quietness and reflection. And then, towards the end of this process, we consider all that you've experienced today.

So, you begin to share your thoughts and your feelings with the whole group. From my prayer today, and this is the voice of the group, I feel. We begin to express how the spirit might have moved us individually. But now we look at how the Spirit is speaking to us as a group. Noticing that phrase, from my prayer today. From my prayer, not by prayer this morning, but my prayer last night, my prayer today and listening to the voices of those in my group, what is the spirit calling me calling us to? Then at the end of that session, we will have a short summary that might capture some of the importance of your discussion, there will be probably reflected diversity of views and opinions will be positive and negatives but should be faithful to the people's voices and what emerged from reflection.

What I want to stress here is part of this process is not bringing my problems to the group. Not saying in my parish is the problem. We're responding to the Word of God here and now and how that word of God might impact on that question that we're called to discern. How can we, we as a group gathered here today, express synodality, as we move towards the establishment of a Diocesan Pastoral Council. That makes sense as clear as well, as I say, we'll work through this this afternoon, Angela's going to lead us through this listening and discernment this afternoon.

I just want to finish by, by once again clearly outlining the importance of the Word of God being proclaimed. That we listen with our minds and with our hearts, that we humble ourselves and open ourselves, to allow the Spirit to speak within us. And to have confidence that the Spirit will speak within us. We then listen to what each other says to each other, how the spirit has spoken to the people around you on your table, and to have confidence that the Spirit is speaking through them. Maybe a different way than the Spirit speaking to you, but the Spirit is speaking through them. Then to come to some kind of consensus or discernment about how the spirit might be speaking to you as a group. So, we have this listening with the ear of the heart and then we have this discernment, how is the Spirit leading us? And once we can see where the Spirit is leading us, then we can see or perhaps begin this journey of how a Diocesan Pastoral Council might reflect synodality. Thank you.