



**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 11 July, 2021
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Many of you here in the Cathedral this morning would be aware, I hope, that the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia is soon to hold its first Formal Assembly, which begins on October. The journey which the Church has undertaken in preparation for this Council has been a long one and although that has meant that some of the initial enthusiasm for the Council has faded over time, it has also meant that we have had more time than we had originally expected to enter into the most important work of the Council which is to discern, together as God's people, just what God is asking of us as the Church in Australia at this time in our history.

In one sense, of course, we already know the answer to this question. We find it spelt out on every page of the gospel, including this morning's gospel passage. As Saint John Paul II once said the mission of the Church – that is, our mission as the Church – *“is found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever”*. But the pope went on to say that this mission must be *“translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community”*. And that is why the question which has been at the heart of the Plenary Council from its very beginnings has invited us to try and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit leading us to understand how that message and that mission is to be understood and lived out here, in Australia and now, at this particular time in our story.

In many ways this is an invitation to all of us to consider, carefully and prayerfully, how successful we are and have been in helping both our own communities of faith and the wider community in which we live to understand and experience the beauty and promise of our Catholic faith. Our own communities of faith might be as small and intimate as our immediate family and our local parish family, and as wide as the whole Catholic community spread across the country. The wider community in which we live might be as small as our local street or neighbourhood and as wide as the social and political institutions which are so influential in shaping our Australian society.

What all of this is pointing to, of course, is that we are all, because of our baptism, teachers of the faith. We are all disciples of Jesus, who in today's gospel is presented as the Teacher. It is he who proclaimed himself to be the Way we are called to follow, the Truth to which we are called to commit ourselves, and the Life from whom we draw energy in order to be faithful and faith-filled.

It is true, of course, that in the Church we have those who are called and sent by God to be official teachers of the faith. This is the role of our bishops, and of our priests and deacons in communion with



their bishops. It is the role of those who teach in our universities, colleges and schools. It is the role of those who work as catechists in our parishes. But all of these people teach the faith so that those they teach can become themselves teachers of the faith. No-one is, or at least no-one should be, simply a passive receiver of the gift of faith. All of us, each in our own particular situation and context, is also called to be a proclaimer and a sharer of the faith.

There is a legend about Saint Francis of Assisi, whose name our present pope has adopted, which recounts that Saint Francis used to tell his friars to *“preach the gospel always – and use words if you have to”*. Whether Francis actually said this no-one really knows, but the message is clear. It was a message expressed very well by Pope Saint Paul VI who once remarked that *“modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”*.

All of this helps us to understand a little more deeply the meaning of this morning’s gospel, which is not just a recounting of an event from the distant past but a word of the Lord for us and to us today. Jesus does not reserve the task of preaching, teaching and healing to himself. He draws his disciples into the same mission. Today’s gospel speaks of the twelve apostles. Another gospel passage will tell a similar story of a wider group of over seventy of his disciples. Jesus’ instructions to the twelve are quite specific: go in pairs, not alone; don’t make complicated arrangements for the journey, just take a staff; don’t go barefoot, wear sandals; don’t wander aimlessly around, stay in one place; offer the gift of your words and your witness but if people reject them, walk away. While these instructions are rather detailed and clear, the intention behind them also seems clear. It is the intention which is the more important point. Carrying staffs and wearing sandals may not be appropriate for 21st century Australia. But working together rather than being a lone ranger, allowing ourselves to be guided by providence rather than trying to pre-determine every minute detail of the process, presenting ourselves in simplicity (in sandals) rather than in an ostentatious way (bare-footed) that distracts from the message, and sharing the gift of our faith with a freedom that allows people to either accept or reject that faith and that witness – all of this is very important for 21st century Australia.

The Plenary Council does not seek to remodel the Church in ways that would render the Church unfaithful to the Lord’s design – to recreate the Church according to our wishes rather than according to God’s will. The Plenary Council seeks to discover and embrace all that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us and with us and through us so that we can, in our particular place and time, be a credible, faithful and effective sign and bearer of God’s love and salvation for everyone.

Please pray for the success of the Plenary Council for the only measure of success will be our openness to the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit and this is not an easy thing to achieve in our present context in Australia. And in praying for the success of the Council remember that you are praying not only for “the others” but also for yourselves – for it together that God is calling us to be not just the teachers of the faith but living witnesses to the beauty and transforming power of that faith.