



**Pentecost Sunday
Commissioning of additional Plenary Council Members
Sacrament of Confirmation**

Homily

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

**Sunday 23 May 2021
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

There are two very important things happening in the Cathedral this morning. Every Sunday is important, of course, because we gather as a community of brothers and sisters in the faith to bring the reality of our lives to God, thanking him for all that is good and asking for healing and forgiveness for all that is not.

Today, however, this weekly expression of our faith takes on an even more special significance. Firstly and most importantly a group of young people will soon step forward to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. I am sure they have been preparing for a long time for this very important moment. It is, after all, a once-in-a-lifetime event for them, as it was for all those of us who are already confirmed.

This morning, in a new and powerful way, these young people will be overshadowed by the power of God's Holy Spirit who will renew and deepen in them the gift of faith, of hope, and of love which are at the heart of every Christian life.

And then, just before the final blessing at Mass, we will commission some more members of the Fifth Plenary Council of the Church in Australia. They will join those already commissioned as representatives of the Archdiocese of Perth here in Western Australia, or as representatives of major agencies and missions of the Church, as over 300 Catholics gather in October to try and discover, by listening to each other, just what it is that God is asking of us as the Church in Australia at this time.

These two special moments, the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the commissioning of new members for the Plenary Council may not seem, at first glance, to be connected but in fact they really are very deeply connected.

When we speak of the Sacrament of Confirmation which so many of us have already received, we speak of it as one of the sacraments of full initiation into the life of God's Church. The first sacrament of initiation, we might say of 'belonging', is of course baptism, and the third and final



sacrament, the culminating sacrament, is the sacrament of the Eucharist. In some parts of the Catholic Church, and especially in the Eastern Catholic Churches, baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist are all celebrated together. This also happens when adults who have never been baptised decide to become members of the Church: they are baptised, confirmed and then admitted to Holy Communion in the same ceremony, normally on Holy Saturday Night when we celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

Most of us, however, were probably baptised as small babies, confirmed when we were about 11 or 12 years old, and had already received our First Communion a couple of years before that. But whether we receive them separately or together these sacraments are all intimately connected because they all give expression to different aspects of the fundamental Christian vocation which we all share.

One of the great saints of the early Church, Saint Augustine, expressed it this way. In baptism the Holy Spirit comes to us as the giver of life. Through the Holy Spirit's power we are united to Christ as the one who brings us life and sets us free from sin. In confirmation the Holy Spirit is at work in us to strengthen and deepen our faith so that we can share the gift of life we have been given with others, especially through our witnessing to the gospel by the way we live. And then, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the Eucharist the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ and the Lord comes to us as food for our strength and joy and growth. These three realities in our lives as Catholics all work together to remind us that the faith we have been given is a faith we are called to share with others and a faith which the Lord in his love and care for us wants to deepen. This is exactly what Saint Paul is getting out when he speaks of the Church, the community of faith of which we are all a part, as the living body of Christ, the ongoing presence of Christ in the world today.

The people whom we will commission as members of the Plenary Council at the end of Mass, together with the many others around the country who will join them in the work of the Plenary Council, are inspiring examples of what it looks like to say 'yes' to all the gifts which the Lord wishes to give us through our baptism, confirmation and our regular celebration of the Eucharist.

My hope and prayer this morning, then, is that those who are confirmed today will be inspired by the courage and generosity of those we commission for the Plenary Council; that those who are commissioned will be reminded by these brave young people of the wonderful gifts of the Lord which they first received through the sacraments and which have helped them to walk faithfully in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd throughout their lives; and that all of us will remember that it is together, as members of the Catholic community, faithful to our baptism and confirmation and the Lord's gift of himself to us in the Eucharist, that we can truly be the Church God is calling us to be: a living sign and a bearer of God's love for all people.