



**28th Sunday Ordinary Time
Plenary Council First Assembly Closing Mass (Perth)**

Homily

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

**Sunday 10 October, 2021
Chapel of St Michael the Archangel, Leederville**

This morning when I got here, the Communications Manager, Jamie O'Brien, asked me for a copy of the text of my homily. And I wasn't able to give you one because I don't have one. But I wanted to reassure you that I'm not just waffling on (hopefully I'm not just waffling on), I went for a very long walk this morning - I'm so used to getting up early that I did the same thing this morning - I went for a very long walk this morning and tried, in a sense to preach the homily to myself as I often do, because I feel I don't need to hear it then probably no one else needs to hear it either.

And what came to me is that if we had tried to find three readings, pulling them from anywhere, for this morning's final Mass in the sense of our First Assembly of the Plenary Council, we made well have chosen these three, even though they are the ones that the Church offers us for this particular Sunday. Because I think each one of them, in one way or the other, picks up the central theme of our Plenary Council, that if I could sum it up just a couple of words, is 'Letting Go.'

All three readings, in a way, are about letting go, or perhaps also about letting go in order to let God in. That's what we've been trying to do together this week. And what we will be trying to do, not just as Members of the Plenary Council but as the whole Church in Australia, over the next nine months leading up to the Second Assembly, hopefully in Sydney, as much as we love being here, but hopefully in Sydney, when we could all be together.

The First Reading gives us a bit of a recipe if you like, for learning how to let go. It's all about wisdom. Of course, we know that wisdom is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit with which we're so familiar and for which we pray for so often. And it's been at the heart of our Plenary Council journey for the last three or four years, the gift of the Spirit: 'Come Holy Spirit of Pentecost, Come Holy Spirit of the Great South Land.'

I'm not an expert on the theology of wisdom, and I don't know quite how you link wisdom and the Holy Spirit together, but I know there's a connection. But at the start of this morning's



reading it says “I prayed and understanding was given to me, I entreated and the spirit of wisdom came too.”

We need to want - as we say these prayers so often - but we need in our hearts to want the Holy Spirit to come. And we need to open our hearts to allow the Holy Spirit in. The way we do that is through prayer: turning away from ourselves, and turning to the Lord, in order that then we can turn to each other and to God's people. So it is about, in a sense, letting go of what we want, in order to open ourselves to what God wants. What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time? Which, as I said at the time, may or may not be exactly the same thing that we want - that's what we're trying to find out.

And then the Second Reading alerts us to the fact that this will be a challenging experience. To open ourselves to God, in the context of the Second Reading, the Word of God is to open ourselves to be included. The word of God is alive and active and cuts like a double edged sword. So if we have the courage to say, “Come Holy Spirit”, if we have the courage to open our minds and hearts to the Word of God, we need to be prepared to be wounded. Cut open, in order that room can be made for the Holy Spirit to really penetrate into our minds and hearts and lead us forward.

And then there is the Gospel, the story of a man who comes up to Jesus and puts that famous question to him, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” There are three versions of this story in the different Gospels and the man is described in different ways, though sometimes mistakenly we just put all three into one version, because we missed what the individual gospel writer was trying to say. We can be reminded that with the different gospel stories, if we were to put them together, sometimes he is described just as a rich man; sometimes he's described as a very just man, who has kept all of these commandments since he was very young; and sometimes he's described as a young man. The rich young man is the way we often talk about his story. He comes to Jesus, and he's a remarkable young man, so much so that we're telling this morning's story - that after the encounter has begun to unfold between Jesus and this man, Jesus looks steadily at him and loves him. Jesus loves everyone, we know that, of course, but within the context of the story, there's something about this young man (or this man) who draws Jesus to him. He looks at him and he loves him. And it seems to be in response to the affirmation of this young man that he has kept all of these commandments from his earliest youth. It seems to be his fidelity that, perhaps, is drawing Jesus to him.

But then comes the crux, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And after Jesus talked about the commandments He said, “Well, I have kept all of things since I was young.” Then Jesus says some words to him, that I think He's saying to each one of us as disciples and to the Church in Australia: “There is something you lack”. And in a sense, all week the Members of the Council have tried, have been trying to identify what it is that we are lacking. What is it that's stopping us from being the Church that the Lord is calling us to be? So as Jesus says to the young man in the story, “There is one thing you lack” - He says the same to us. And while He



goes on to tell the young man what it is that he lacks, it's up to us to discover - as individuals and as a Church - what it is that we lack.

But for the young man (we're going to call him the rich young man), but for this man, it is his wealth that is the problem. "Go sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and then come and follow me". And then comes what I think is one of the saddest lines in any of the Gospels: "The man's face fell these words and he went away sad because he was a man of great wealth. He couldn't let go, it was just too much. It was a hurdle too high for him to jump and Jesus wasn't offering any way around that hurdle: "There is one thing you lack, go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor and then come follow Me".

As I was thinking about this as I went for my walk this morning, I could even sense this man has turned to his wealth, really, into the God that he's following. He's put his wealth at the heart of his life and that's one thing that he won't let go of. And I think that's a challenge for us. I don't know your financial situations (and I don't want to know your financial situation) – some of you might be fabulously wealthy, and this might be causing you to feel a bit uncomfortable - but I think for the majority, that's probably not the case. But there will be something or some things, some little goals that we've established at the heart of our lives, and in doing so, have pushed the real God out of the way. All this week the Member of the Plenary Council have, in a sense, been trying to identify those little goals. And then having identified them, as we will continue to do across the next nine months, we then have to find the courage to let go of them. And why? In order to put the real God back where the real God belongs.

How often, as so many of you have heard me say, almost to the point where I think people might be sick of it - but I'm not sick of it - that the great challenge that we face, is to return to the Church to Jesus Christ and return Jesus Christ to the Church. And if he's not there, it's because we put other little gods in His place, whether those little gods be an attachment to particular structures, or an attachment to my own cherished hopes and dreams - who knows what they are? Each one of us needs to answer that question for ourselves, and we as the Catholic Church in Australia are trying to answer it for ourselves as a community - but they will be there.

And Jesus is saying to us this morning, to the whole Church this morning (not just as an institution because the Church is so much more than an institution), saying to the whole of the Church, the whole reality of the Church something like, "Identify what the little gods are that you put in place of the big God". We were reminded during the council not to make God too small. What are the little gods that we put in place of the big God? We have to identify, listen to each other, to discover them, and then have the courage to shift them out of the way so that we can put Jesus back where he belongs at the heart of the Church.

This is my prayer for all of us, Members of the Council, our families, and friends and communities - the whole Church in Australia. That we have the courage to answer honestly the



question, what is it that we make, what is the hurdle that we're finding it so hard to get over, that is stopping us from running after the Jesus who is striding ahead.

Transcribed courtesy Archdiocesan Communications Office