



**Tuesday Week 31 Of Ordinary Time  
Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference – November Plenary**

**Homily**

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**Tuesday 5 November, 2024  
Chapel of Mary MacKillop, North Sydney**

The concluding chapter of the final document of the Synod on Synodality opens with the invitation of the risen Jesus to His disciples to “*come and have breakfast*”. In one sense it might seem a rather humble invitation compared to the one that is issued in this morning’s gospel to those invited to the great banquet.

The setting of this final invitation from Jesus to the disciples to join Him in a meal, however, enables us to see just how significant this meal is. As the final synod document puts it, “*eating with them once again, following their abandonment and denial of him, Jesus invites (the disciples) anew into communion with Him, imprinting upon them the sign of His eternal mercy that opens on to the future*” (152). While this is true of all the disciples, it is especially true of Peter who, through the extraordinary sensitivity of Jesus, who knows exactly what Peter needs, is given the opportunity, three times, to profess his love for the Lord, in this way receiving healing and release from his three devastating denials.

Peter responds from his heart to this precious invitation from Jesus, as all the disciples do when He invites them to share the fish and bread He has prepared for them. They had all, apart from the Beloved Disciple, failed Jesus so badly when He needed them the most. After His resurrection most of them were overwhelmed and overawed, confused and doubting. But now, as if to confirm the truth of His words at the Last Supper - *I do not call you servants anymore; I call you friends* - Jesus draws them into this intimate, simple, familial gesture of a shared meal.

The response of those invited to the banquet in this morning’s parable couldn’t be more different. Rather than accepting the invitation with gratitude and excitement, they all come up with excuses. One has just bought a new property, another has just got married, a third has some new oxen he wants to try out. All three situations have their own importance, of course, but none of them seems sufficient to justify the rudeness implied in their declining the invitations. The property would still be there the morning after the banquet, the oxen



similarly would presumably be safely quartered overnight, and the newly married man could probably have brought his wife with him to the feast.

This morning's gospel, then, and the story of the meal of bread and fish beside the lake, invite us to reflect on our own openness to the many invitations which we receive to enter more fully into the kingdom of God. That kingdom, as this morning's gospel reminds us, has room for everybody: *"the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame"*. Indeed, the kingdom has room for everybody, for *"todos, todos, todos"* as Pope Francis says so often. But what both stories also remind us is that invitations have not only to be received but also accepted - or rejected. Those who accepted the invitation to the banquet in this morning's gospel had nothing to which they were so attached that the invitation had no appeal for them. Their "emptiness" was crying out to be filled with the good things of the Lord. The disciples on the shore of the lake also had an emptiness - they had been "hollowed out" by their abandonment of Jesus - and that emptiness, too, was crying out to be filled with the compassionate and transforming mercy and love of Jesus.

Today we begin the plenary meetings of our Conference. Coming so soon after the conclusion of the Synod it will mark for us the beginning of our reflection on how we can respond to the call of Pope Francis - we might say the invitation of Pope Francis - to help our local Churches develop a more Synodal profile. It is a call, Pope Francis assures us, that comes from the Lord. Will we, like the disciples, accept this invitation or will we, like those in this morning's parable, politely or not so politely, decline? And if we do respond, what will that response look like? The temptation might be to focus immediately on structural questions, and the final Synodal document certainly points us in this direction. Certainly the Synod has proposed many developments and even changes in some of our structures. But just as Jesus puts love at the heart of the renewal of the disciples after the resurrection - *Peter, do you love me?* - so we will need to put a spirituality of the heart at the centre of any Synodal conversion of the Church in Australia. *"A spirituality of synodality"* the final document reminds us, *"flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart ... it requires asceticism, humility, patience, and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven. It does so without ambition, envy or desire for domination or control, cultivating the same attitude of Christ who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7) (par 43).*

*"We should, therefore,"* the documents goes on to suggest, *"look to the gospels to outline for us, the journey of conversion we are required to undertake, learning little by little to make Jesus's practices our own ... (he) never sent anyone away without stopping to listen and to speak to them, whether men or women, Jews or pagans, doctors of the law or publicans, righteous men and women or sinners, beggars, the blind, lepers or the sick. By*



*meeting people wherever their history and personal freedom had led them, he revealed to them the face of the Father ... by responding through words and gestures, he renewed their lives, opening the path to healed relationships” (par 51) .*

As we listen to St Paul reminding us in this morning’s first reading that we must have in us *the same mind that was in Christ Jesus*, perhaps it is here that we will find for ourselves, for each other, and for the people of God in the Churches which we serve, just what it means to be synodal bishops in a synodal Church.