



**Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year B)
ACBC Plenary- May 2024**

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxtton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

**Chapel of St Mary MacKillop, North Sydney
Saturday 4 May 2024**

In the first week of Lent, the catechumens and candidates for entrance into full communion with the Catholic Church are called to the Rite of Election in our Cathedral. It is one of those very special occasions in the year. The Archbishop and I, with some chosen clergy, meet each person with their sponsor after their names are entered into the Book of the Elect or the Book of Candidates.

It is a very moving liturgy. There is a lot of joy and expectation. When the group that I meet comes forward, in the few moments that we have to speak with one another, I ask, How have you come to this moment of decision?

Mostly, the answer is that someone has shown them the value of having faith in Jesus Christ. It may have been through their Catholic partner in marriage; someone they had met through work; a friend with whom they studied at uni; having observed a person who is Catholic whose kindness, compassion and courage had shone through in situations that, if they had to face themselves, they would not have coped. Sometimes it was through a friendship of a chaplain at their school or university.

Every one of them had their own story. And they were grateful for that person's presence in their life. And they had a sense, a sense of relief, that we belong to each other in a mutual relationship, that we are part of a people, and that our destiny is a shared one.

The Word of the Mass today is about setbacks and pushbacks.

The evangelist John reflects on how Jesus dealt with the setback of rejection that goes on to hatred. Paul had the same experience as he bravely went from one synagogue to another with the Good News. Mostly his hearers went from initial interest to rejection and



opposition. He would suffer but he continued. He manifested a strength to marvel at. In the case of Jesus, we know that with each setback His love for the Father intensified, and He found wisdom and deepening insight in God's plan.

On his second missionary journey, Paul was moving intentionally further east, but he stopped short in going any further into Asia. The Spirit, it seemed to him, was pushing back. Paul turned west, until he reached the shores looking across to Macedonia from Troy. The church would be planted in Macedonia by Paul and his companions, for the Good News to spread further west in Europe.

Paul experienced in that pushback that the Spirit's influence is not confined to the institution of the Church, and often produces unforeseen and independent development. The Apostolic group was moved by the Spirit of God but had no monopoly on the Spirit. Paul learnt a great deal by this experience.

The setback or pushback that comes our way needs to be the reason to pause and reflect. Pope Francis, in the little book, *Let us Dream*, reflected on the experience of the setback of living through COVID. He said that to enter into crisis is to be sifted, as Jesus told Peter in St Luke's Gospel. Your categories and ways of thinking get shaken up; your priorities and lifestyles are challenged. You cross a threshold, either by your own choice or by necessity. You wonder: Are you going to come through this crisis and how?

He reminded us that once we are confronted by a crisis, or the questions in life that surprise us, we do not come out of it the same way. We come out of it better or worse, but never the same.

Our experiences pose a testing of us and are the ways in which we can grow. He said, the trials of life make us reveal our heart because at some point we have to choose.

Those who proceeded to the Profession of Faith and Baptism at Easter began that journey because of their experiences of the behaviour of Christians that posed questions within each of them. The Spirit worked in so many contexts, through so many ordinary people. We are being called constantly to look for the Spirit speaking around us. So "Let us be attentive".