

HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN
ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL
5.00pm 3 APRIL 2023
CHRISM MASS
AND MASS ONLINE

Readings

Isaiah 61:1-3, 6. 8-9

Apocalypse 1:5-8

Gospel Luke 4:16-21

We could say, from tonight's Gospel, that "The spirit of the Lord has been given to us; He has sent us to bring the Good News to the poor...to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

In our Year of WALKING TOGETHER as an Archdiocese, there are many fresh examples of us walking together in a synodal fashion to "proclaim the Lord's year of favour". Following the Plenary Council of Australia and now preparing for the two International Synods on Synodality, these examples should not be underestimated. They are showcased in the very recently published edition of Catholic Voice.

We see it in the parish of Young's Palm Cross ministry, Pambula's Walking Together Coastal initiative, Campbell's St Thomas More's school fabulous NAPLAN results, Grenfell's community efforts, Braidwood's recent school enrolments increase and Gundagai's non-English speaking students being embraced by the community.

A month ago, I was present in Rome when Pope Francis gave an inspirational talk on the way of Synodality regarding the whole Universal Church (18th February 2023).

Two important points that caught my eye were as follows.

Quoting from Pope Francis directly, "The path that God is indicating to the Church is precisely that of a more intense and concrete experience of communion and journeying together." He asks the Church to leave behind ways of acting separately, on parallel tracks that never meet. "Clergy separated from Laity, Consecrated persons from Clergy and the Faithful; The intellectual faith of certain elites separated from the faith of ordinary people; The Roman Curia from particular Churches, Bishops from Priests; Young people from the elderly, spouses and families disengaged from the life of the communities."

The Pope suggests that we need to recover an "Integral Ecclesiology." He says, "It means leaving behind a sociological vision that distinguishes classes and social rank and is ultimately based on power assigned to each category."

A second observation that the Pope made that caught my eye was regarding Synodality in the way we express ourselves as Church in the Modern World on Mission. He refers us to the Nascent Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.

He says, "In this one people of God that is the Church, the fundamental element is our belonging to Christ." In the moving accounts of the Acts of the Apostles and the early Martyrs, we often find a simple profession of faith: "I am Christian, thus I cannot sacrifice to Idols." These were the words, for example, spoken by Polycarp the bishop of Smyrna, and by Justin and his companions, Lay persons. These Martyrs did not say: "I am a Bishop" or "I am a Lay person..." No, they said simply: "I am a Christian"...We are baptised: We are Christian: We are Disciples of Jesus. Everything else is secondary."

Such important Papal insights need to be reflected upon by all of us as we take the long view of Synodality in the decades ahead as a new way of expressing our fellowship in Christ.

I would like to share briefly a recent personal example here in the Archdiocese of trying to do this in a way that truly connects.

I am referring to the up and coming amalgamation of Marymead and CatholicCare. They will not be walking in parallel lines in the future. They will be working together without sacrificing their particular charisms on the local level.

A personal example is that a lovely marketing person who wanted to assist in the promotional strategies of bringing these two important agencies of the Archdiocese together visited me recently.

It sounds easier said than done!

As we began talking, I felt that here is the corporate world meeting the theological world. How can we connect for the greater glory of God?

It is almost as if it is the world of the Logos meeting the world of Ethos.

The world of the Logos is our Christian charism. It is our Johannine proclamation as an Easter People that, "The Word has become Flesh and dwells amongst us" in Jesus Christ's Death and Resurrection. This is not something just for the end of time. It is something also for the present time. All of us as the Church and as the Logos Easter people are hungry for Missionary Evangelisation and allowing the fragrance of Christ to enter into the world of Ethos.

The world of Ethos is focused on purpose and goals. They use the term KPI – Key Performance Indicators. How do our two worlds meet and not work in parallel lines?

Let us always recall that the Catholic Church is a "both/and" community. It is never an "either/or" community.

To have Ethos without Logos will present human endeavours devoid of any transcendence that penetrates the human soul. It would produce a confused array of elite ideologies containing partial truths.

On the other hand, however, Logos without Ethos produces parallel lines that never meet with the joys and sufferings of humanity. Ultimately, it will be dismissed as irrelevant. This is because it fails to propose two ways that are full of beauty, truth, and goodness for the dignity of the human person.

So Logos must always be in a deep listening dialogue with Ethos.

This is the challenge of being Missionary disciples of the Resurrection. I want you to know that our encounter together went well. There was determination from both of us to listen carefully and define the common ground. We both ended agreeing that the sentiment and virtue of hope is the bridge that we must further explore to move us forward in a way that changes hearts and structures.

So, here we are at our Chrism Mass. We have gathered with so many of our Priests, Deacons and Seminarians and the Church is generously filled with many wonderful lay faithful from throughout the Archdiocese.

Here the challenge is before us: That the lungs of the Church, both Institution and Charism, must breathe together.

Pope Francis always begins such discussions by relying on the Vatican II documents and our shared Baptism. We walk together in this foundation. At the Easter Vigils in our parishes throughout the world, the commitments to living out our Baptismal mission are renewed.

It will mean that we proclaim Jesus as the great High Priest and Victim, especially in the Eucharist. It will mean that we recognise the priesthood of all the people of God in Baptism. It will also mean that we recognise the importance of the Ministerial Priesthood.

On this latter point, again relying on the Vatican II documents, we must repeat, and may it always be heard clearly, that the Ministerial Priesthood exists to serve the common priesthood of all. The Ministerial Priest is here to assist all the Baptised to live out their Baptism, and assist all in locating and discerning charisms that enliven the community of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, the Church.

Please let us ponder on this: The priest is to serve but never dominate the faithful. He expresses his ministry in the presbyterate with the Bishop in obedience and respect. He is never a loner.

The approach that Priests delegate the Laity to service must be overcome. By Baptism, we all become co-responsible for the Church and its mission as we walk together in a manner that proclaims Christ. A special challenge today is to involve all the Laity, especially women, into the full life of the Baptised.

Therefore, we have much to pray for and rededicate ourselves to in this Chrism Mass. In a moment the priests will renew their priestly promises to serve all the Baptised, especially in administering the Sacraments and in the ministry of teaching and preaching. Hence, we bless the oils that are used throughout the year in our Archdiocese.

In addition, the priests will renew their vows of service to be faithful stewards of the Mysteries of God. This one phrase seems to summarise it all: to become more of what we are – “faithful stewards of the Mysteries of God.” For this, we pray. Amen!