

The Kingdom Within

by Fr Noel Connolly SSC, Plenary Council Facilitation Team

As we prepare for the Plenary Council 2020, we are being encouraged to speak boldly and to share what is in our hearts. One of my concerns is that I do not think it is easy to know what is deep in our hearts and it is even more difficult to express it adequately. Also speaking is an art, and it is learnt only with practice.

People who have not been encouraged to speak up for decades will probably speak clumsily, angrily or shallowly the first time around. It is only over time that we eventually learn what we most deeply want to say.

I was reminded of this a few Sundays ago when we read the story of Jesus curing the blind man as he entered Jericho (Luke 18: 35-43). Jesus heard the blind man calling out and “ordered him to be brought to him; and when the man came near, he asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

It was obvious what the blind man wanted; he wanted to see. But Jesus insists on asking, “What do you want me to do for you?” It was important to Jesus that the blind man articulate what he wanted. It is important to each of us that we be able to answer the same question.

I suspect most of us do not know what we really want. We know our immediate, shallow and superficial desires, but most of the time we are too busy and distracted to recognise our deepest desires.

As DH Lawrence said, “Man [sic] has little needs and deeper needs. We have fallen into the mistake of living from our little needs till we have almost lost our deeper needs in a sort of madness.”

John A. Sanford begins his *The Kingdom Within* with another helpful image.

As a boy, he spent a month each summer in an old farmhouse in New Hampshire. The family was not wealthy, so the house had no electricity or plumbing. Their water supply came from a well. The water from this well was unusually cold, pure and a joy to drink, and the well was remarkable because it never ran dry.

Even in the most severe droughts, it yielded up its cool, clear water. Eventually, the family earned enough money to put in electricity and plumbing, and the old well was covered over. Several years later, driven by curiosity, he decided to open the well and was shocked to find that the well that survived the severest droughts was now bone dry.

He eventually learnt, that a well is fed by hundreds of tiny rivulets that seep through gaps in the rocks but if water is not taken regularly from the well the rivulets slowly close up. The well was dry because no one had drawn water from it.



For Sanford, that was an image of the spiritual life. Our souls dry up if we do not draw from the kingdom within us. We become dry, barren and spiritually dead “if we have covered over our souls and ceased to draw up into our consciousness what is contained in the inner depths”.

The Plenary Council 2020 process is a process of prayer, listening, sharing and discernment to know what God is asking of us in Australia today. It provides us with a process to search our hearts, to draw on the well within and to answer Jesus’ question.

It won’t be automatic. Our first answers will probably be shallow, clumsy or angry. It will take time to discover what is most profound in our hearts.

That is why I would encourage people to share and send in their responses often. It is not something that can be done in one listening and dialogue session. What we are trying to develop is a habit of mind, heart and prayer.