



HOMILY POINTS
Weekday Eucharistic Liturgies
of the First Assembly of the Plenary Council
3-10 October 2021



MONDAY, OCTOBER 4: Memorial of St Francis of Assisi

Readings: Gal 6:14-18, Mt 11:25-30. Psalm 15: You are my inheritance, O God.

Francis was born in late 12th century Italy, into a world not unlike our own. Society was restless, focused on the accumulation of wealth, and in need of reform. Francis was a true son of this world until a moment of conversion when he saw the emptiness of all he had set his heart on.

St Francis' life was turned around. It came to be centred not on wealth and achievement but on the person of Jesus – it was to Jesus, the “gentle and humble in heart” that he looked for the grace to embrace poverty and to serve others.

Many were attracted to Francis' way of life and sought to join him. He composed for his followers a rule of life which simply demanded that they “...follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and walk in his footsteps.”

For Francis, to follow Jesus was to learn the way of selflessness and of joyful reliance on God. For him, there was no yoke too difficult and no burden too heavy.

Francis of Assisi unites all Christians, especially as we join together today in marking the closing of the Season of Creation. Its theme, Renewing the Household (*oikos*) of God, invites us to see the household of God as the whole of God's home – our planet earth.

Francis was proclaimed as Patron Saint of Ecology by Pope John Paul II in 1979. In the midst of often frenetic activity, Francis found that nature spoke eloquently to him about God. He saw God in all of creation, and in all creatures. For Francis, nature was often his “prayer space”, the place of contemplation, where his faith was strengthened, and his energy renewed.

As members of the Plenary Council, we might be feeling the weight of the responsibilities we have taken on, and the heavy burdens that we carry. In today's Gospel, Jesus assures us of his gentle provision for our needs and invites us to learn from him. Like his disciple Francis, we too might yearn to be renewed in all that God has created. Especially in this Eucharist we can find such a place of rest and succour, in the silence of our hearts, where God awaits us.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5

Readings: Eccles 3:1-8; Lk 10:38-42. Psalm 32: Lord, let your mercy be on us

This Gospel is most often understood, and preached, as Jesus encouraging us to achieve a proper balance between action and contemplation, between the “listening” Mary and the “frenetic” Martha. While Mary contentedly sits at the Lord’s feet, Mary is distracted with “all the serving” and appeals for Jesus’ intervention which comes but not as she expects.

It is a Gospel that raises the question of hospitality, of how we as disciples can best serve the presence of Jesus not only in the Church but also in our world, beset as it is by conflict and rejection, a world which has become for so many, and tragically, inhospitable.

How might we best serve God’s presence among us? This is a key theme that underlines all of our discernment and reflection during these important days of the Plenary Council.

Jesus appears to take the side of Mary, for contemplation, declaring “It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her”. However, rather than advocating passivity or inertia, Luke’s account of this domestic gathering underscores the priority of ‘sitting’ and learning at the feet of Jesus so that this ‘sitting’ and learning might inform our actions.

Indeed, it is worth noting that Luke places this story immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Luke the Evangelist subtly portrays Martha as wanting to be a good Samaritan but, in order to become one, she needs to first learn from the Good Samaritan himself.

Like Martha, we are indeed invited to serve the presence of God, to attend to the needs of others, to be good hosts and serve others as Christ exhorts us in words and deeds throughout his ministry. However, this particular scene from Jesus’ life highlights for us the need to be first found by Jesus in *our* need, to sit at *his* feet and receive *his* teaching and time, before we can serve him as he invites.



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6

Readings: Acts 2:1-11.; Lk 11:1-4. Psalm 144: I will praise your name for ever.

Our Gospel reading brings us to the heart of that prayer to which the Plenary Council, and indeed all of our Christian lives, calls us. Prayer-filled discernment is not a choice between our own self-styled preferences but rather a commitment to enter into the prayer of Jesus to the Father whose name is holy, whose Kingdom is to come, who provides us with the Bread of Life, who forgives us our sins and brings us through times of trial.

As well, this prayer of praise and petition is not a private prayer but, as shared in the witness of the first apostles in Acts, is a prayer of the whole Church in which we implore the Holy Spirit to pour down upon us in the unity of faith. It is this Holy Spirit who enables us, together, to be faithful to the prayer of Jesus, 'thy Kingdom come', who enables us to hear one another, each in our own language and experience, so that we can better live as Jesus has taught us.

In attending to the events of that first Pentecost, we are challenged during these days of our own Plenary Council to hear the many 'languages' in which the faithful speak and express themselves, those voices who seek life's meaning in a secularised society; those who are estranged from the Church on account of its scandals and shortcomings; those who find themselves at the margins of Church and society; those for whom the Church has been a source of grace and comfort, and those who seek a word of hope in troubled times.

Today's readings call us to pray so we can hear, to listen first so we can speak as the Holy Spirit invites, to unite ourselves to the prayer of Jesus who is the way to the Father and to God's Kingdom, to Jesus who teaches us to pray and gives us words of courage and boldness to ask for that Spirit who will 'lead us into all the truth' (Jn 16:13), bestow on us the food for our pilgrimage, and enables us to take confidence in the Father's love and provision in our mission to the world in Jesus' name.



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7: Memorial Our Lady of The Rosary

Readings: Acts 1:12-14; Lk 1:26-38. Psalm: Lk 1:46-55 (The Magnificat)

“Nothing is impossible to God”. This is a timely reminder in the midst of our Plenary Council, when the Church in Australia appears to be beset by many challenges and also opportunities for which we depend on God for fidelity and insight, boldness and humility.

The Annunciation brings us into the ‘newness of God’ who in love sends us his Son, and to the invitation that God makes for us to respond to this gift with courage and faith. In her *fiat* or ‘yes’, Mary embodies the deepest vocation of the Church, as a people who are called to look beyond our own interests and concerns, beyond even our own sense of inadequacy and, in this equally challenging and promising time, to trust in the provision of God who can ‘make all things new’ in the gift of Jesus.

Our prayer is that we, like Mary, focus our gaze upon what God wants for us, so that our world might recognise the presence of God in our midst; so that the love and faithfulness of God is seen and experienced in and through our Church in Australia; so that God can do the profound and impossible through us even in our littleness and meagreness.

Throughout the history of the Church, the faithful have continued to pray with Mary for this kind of faith, humility and boldness, meditating on the life of Jesus in the Rosary which we celebrate today. In our prayer we can make the words of the Magnificat our own, giving glory to God as Mary did and trusting that the Author of all life will bring about wonders in our time.

Today, the 7th October, is also the anniversary of the death of Fr Julian Tenison-Woods (+1889), Co-Founder of the Sisters of St Joseph together with St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. Together with Australia’s first saint, we recall Fr Julian as an example of faith in the Church in Australia, and we ask God for the strength to respond to our own times with boldness and creativity. Indeed, “nothing is impossible for God”.



FRIDAY, 8TH OCTOBER

Readings: Eph 3:14-19; Matt 26:36-39. Psalm 32: Lord, let your mercy be on us.

In the shadow of the Cross, we find Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples, praying in “sadness and anguish.” We know that the disciples soon fall asleep in that garden, a response often associated in the Scriptures with the experience of fear. The disciples struggle to stay awake as they dread the burden of reality, anticipating the betrayal or the “falling away from [Jesus]” that their Master has foretold (Mt 26:30).

In proclaiming God’s way, Jesus knows he has brought himself into conflict with the powers and principalities of this world and to the culmination of his ministry. However, Jesus chooses not to deny these menacing circumstances that surround him but enters into these sufferings with undeterred faith, praying “Let it be as you, not I, would have it” (Mt 26:39). As we are to learn, it is the One who remains awake who works the transformation of the world.

The trials and tribulations for the Church in Australia at this time are undeniable. The trauma, grief and distress of many in the Church is real and acute, in light of the past decades of scandal, diminishing participation in many of our communities, challenges from without, and a sometimes fragile unity within the Church itself. All are wounds that the Plenary Council and the preparations that have preceded it have named and seek to bring into focus, not as the end of the Church’s story in Australia but as the beginning of a much needed renewal. The signs of this renewal are already there for us to recognise and build upon.

Like Christ himself, we are called to enter into these all-too-human contradictions in the world and the Lord’s Church with faith, not a naïve optimism or denial that pretends that things are other than they are, but with a Christ-like hope that engages these complex realities with the trust that the Father’s love, that Resurrection, is never too far away.

We, like Christ, are invited to open ourselves to the full reality of our situation, with its light and shadows, to bring our vulnerability to prayer, especially in our sadness and anguish, and to gain confidence and encouragement from the love of God who supplies us the strength to stay awake with him. It is this power of God’s love that enabled Jesus to face what lay ahead. Let us bring our distress, our yearnings, our vulnerabilities and needs for the Church in Australia to God in prayer and humbly listen to the quiet whisperings and, indeed, to the thunderous pealing of God’s Spirit, in and with us, inviting our faith and response.



SATURDAY, 9TH OCTOBER: Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Readings: 2Cor 3:15-18, 4:1:3-6; Luke 5:1-11. Psalm 104: Lord, send out your spirit

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls his first four disciples, telling Simon the fisherman to put his boat out 'into the deep'. Having caught nothing all night, there is little expectation from Simon that there will be a catch. However, following Christ's word, the fishermen catch so many fish that their nets threaten to tear. Jesus brings the abundance of the Kingdom to those who follow and trust in him.

In these days of the Plenary Council, a great deal of trust is being exercised by all of us as a Church. An underdetermined future awaits us and many are unsure if our efforts to date will bring a catch. We have been invited by the Holy Spirit to 'put out our nets' in the faith that something will be received and that our expectations may be surprised by the presence of God in our lives.

Jesus' invitation to his disciples to go out 'into the deep' is an invitation to new life and understanding, to not fear but to stretch out in faith. We can fruitfully ask ourselves, in what ways are each of us being asked to stretch out from our usual expectations, whether they be high or dim?

It is worth noting that the final image of 'going into the deep' in the Gospel of Luke occurs in chapter 24 when the women go to Christ's tomb: "On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared" (Lk 24:1). In the original Greek text, the women come to the tomb at the 'deep' of morning twilight. Hence, they find themselves 'going into the deep' and they come to see with new eyes. Receiving the message that Jesus has risen, these women share the good news with others (Lk 24:8). Like Simon, James and John before them, the journey of these women into 'the deep' becomes an opportunity for conversion in their discipleship to the Lord.

Returning to our Gospel today, Jesus says to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you it will be people that you will be catching' (Lk 5:10-11). Jesus invites us as his disciples to gather in all who are in need, those who are poor in spirit or circumstance, those who have yet to encounter Jesus, all those seeking hope, those in our world and also those within the Church. We cast our nets in this Plenary Council, that they might yield a great catch through our fidelity to Jesus' word.

