

Bishop Paul's Homily

16TH SUNDAY OF YEAR C - BALLARAT CATHEDRAL, 10.30 AM MASS, JULY 17, 2022

Earlier this month, three hundred people from all around Australia gathered in Sydney for a week of prayer and reflection about our mission as the Church in this country. It was an assembly of the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia, bringing together lay people, religious, deacons, priests and bishops. The celebration began with Mass at the shrine of St Mary MacKillop in North Sydney. In the following week, there was Mass each day at St Mary's Cathedral. The meetings were held in the college next to the cathedral.



In the course of the week, the Plenary Council members shared their views on a wide range of questions. For example, there was discussion of the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics can make to the Church. There was a renewed commitment to responding with justice and compassion to those who have suffered abuse in the Church and to doing all we can to make the Church a safe place for everyone. We looked at how we can share the gospel of Jesus by our actions as well as by our words, by showing practical care for people in need as well as by

bringing a gospel point of view to the issues debated in our society. There was discussion about how we can witness to the equal dignity of women and men, and particularly how we might enhance the role of women in the Church. We reflected on the central place of prayer in the Church's life and the importance of education in the faith, not only for children and young people, but for people of all ages. We looked at how lay people might share with priests and bishops in governance in the Church. We discussed how we can play a part in caring for God's creation, so that our world will be a good home for people today and for the generations to come. You can read the details on these various topics on the Plenary Council website.

This morning I would simply like to highlight the importance the Plenary Council gave to listening to the views of each member. For much of the week we were sitting at tables in groups of nine people. As each topic was considered, each person was invited to share their view for up to two minutes, with the others at the table simply listening. Then we were invited to say what we were hearing. Only then were we invited to have a general discussion on the topic. There was appreciation of the value of listening so that we might all learn from one another. This is in line with the observations of Pope Francis about the benefits of listening. Pope Francis has spoken about "a Church that listens and realises that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth."

We also find an emphasis on listening in this morning's gospel. Here we have the story of Jesus visiting the home of his friends, Lazarus and Martha and Mary. We read that Mary sat down at Jesus' feet and listened to him speaking and Jesus commended Mary for her careful listening.

I was pleased to see that there was such appreciation of the value of listening during the recent Plenary Council in Sydney. I hope we can foster that same spirit of listening in our diocese as we consider how we can put the decisions of the Plenary Council into practice. In that way we will be a Church that listens, a Church in which everyone has something to learn, the faithful people, the priests, the bishop, all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR