

Plenary Council 2022 - a reflection

My experience of the Plenary Council is one of many highs and lows, of confusion and challenges: physical, mental and spiritual and of successes and friendships. I am still struggling with putting everything into context, and getting my head around being involved in something of such a profound historical significance for us, the people of God in Australia. To have had even a tiny part in the shaping of such powerful and far reaching decrees is both humbling and horrifying. It is something I find that I have nothing to compare with and so for now at least, it sits out on its own and remains a unique experience.

Of the many highlights were the daily Masses, the morning prayer and beautiful spirituality of the 'Welcome to Country'. I was touched by the music and the passion and courage of many speakers in their interventions; and I was in awe of the small band of committed organisers who seamlessly wove everything together. I struggled with the physical elements of: cold, wind and rain that seemed to penetrate everywhere, as well as the suspicion, agendas and politics that also surfaced from time to time. I recall that in the First Assembly I really struggled on the Wednesday, wondering if I would be able to get through the rest of the week and the Second Assembly also had it's own dramas played out at the halfway mark.

Wednesday as it turned out, was a pivotal turning point in the Assembly. It had the potential to derail the whole four years and end in disaster. But it didn't, thanks to the graciousness, respect, sensitivity and level-headedness on the part of many. What could have been 'collapse' turned into a deep commitment to go forward together recognising our differences and our common desire. In the end, it became a graced time where the love and unpredictability of the Holy Spirit was palpable, making new beginnings and new ways forward.

I came out on a high, as I think many did, happy that we had made a good start but that there was still much to do, as there is in any living organism. I think about what differences there might have been had we been able to meet in person last October; but we will never know. There seems so many areas that could be developed further but always, the way forward begins with a single step. I am reminded of the Gospel we had recently of Martha and Mary - the Church could very easily be like Martha, because there is so much that needs to be done but unless we remain at the feet of Jesus, focused on him, listening to Him, in vain do we labour. We must stay close to Jesus and listen with humility to what the Spirit is saying. As Archbishop Timothy said in the closing Mass, "He must Increase and I decrease."



Marie Shaddock