

HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN
ST CHRISTOPHER'S CATHEDRAL
5.00pm 30 MARCH 2026
CHRISM MASS
AND MASS ONLINE

Readings

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

Apocalypse 1:5-8

Gospel: Luke 4:16-21

I have heard it on good authority, that the uptake on the present A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) revolution is happening four times faster than the uptake of the Internet revolution of some years ago!

On another level, the uptake on major Church documents is ever so much slower! Church historians speak of the Catholic Church requiring about 100 years to truly appropriate the teaching and directions of a major Church council.

If this is so, then the Vatican II Council documents "roll out" still has about 40 years remaining to appropriate its teaching! This year, many of the Church documents are being highlighted because it is the 60th year anniversary of their publication.

So, although we are not as fast as the A.I. uptake by any means, we need to give great attention on these seminal documents. The Holy Spirit is very much animating the Church through these documents' wisdom. As the old expression goes, "The Holy Spirit is never known to be in a hurry, but then again, is never known to be late!"

At the very beginning of the Vatican II Council in 1962, it is interesting to note the "chatter" of the Catholic world and beyond at that time to the Council.

The majority would say and would still say, that the Vatican II Council is revolutionary for the pastoral and renewal update of the Catholic Church in the modern world.

The minority view at that time was that it would be of little universal pastoral impact, the Council would be short lived, and "we would all be home for Christmas!"

This minority view was humorously showcased in the action of one well known United States Cardinal at that time. Thinking that the Council would only last a short time in the cooler seasons of the Roman year, he made sure that his driver was granted the title of "Peritus" (expert) of the Vatican II Council. When challenged on this matter, he reported to have stated that he couldn't leave his driver, Jack, in the car outside the Vatican all day waiting for him to return. By doing so this would ensure that he was given a comfortable seat within the Basilica!

In a more focused way, we could with authority say that one key area still being unfolded from the Vatican II documents is what we now call "Synodality" (walking together).

Here the majority view would say, it's a view that I share, that what is now being described as synodality is a major teaching of the Catholic Church presently being "rolled out." It has been highly promoted by Pope Francis and now by Pope Leo XIV. Both are giving it a major priority. Even in recent months, every Bishop of the world is being given quite a precise document from the Vatican nominating time benchmarks for this "roll out" to be achieved in Dioceses and national and continental groups. Some commentators even talk about how the second half of the Vatican II Council, with its documents, is now being appropriated in full measure. It is almost as if the Vatican II Council continues today!

The minority view, even embraced by a number of Bishops, would describe synodality as a distracting irritant. For them there was the hope that Pope Leo would "drop it" completely. One way of responding is to ignore it. The idea is to not take it seriously in your parish or in your Diocese. It is going to go away!

Well, I am afraid it is not going to go away.

I would like to mention briefly three compass points of synodality that are really taking a firm foundational hold theologically.

These three points are based on what Pope Francis often reminded us: that it is the Holy Spirit who is the protagonist in the Church. Given this, the Holy Spirit is guiding us strongly in the synodal revolution within the Church. With this preface may I make the following points.

Let us always begin with the Sacrament of Baptism. If we don't do this, we will be distracted as we journey as "the People of God walking to the Father's House together." (The preferred model of Church in the Vatican II Council documents).

If we start considering synodality through the prism of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we tend to end up in dead end streets theologically and pastorally. We tend to focus on functionality and who does what in the Church. It can also be weaponised by ecclesial ideologies that can really distract us.

It might be best for us to refresh ourselves from the Catechism of the Catholic Church in #1213, on a concise definition of Baptism.

The Catechism states, "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water and in the word."

The second compass point pertains to the fact that a permanent conversion of all of us is required. Indeed, we are all on a synodal journey of perpetual discipleship and conversion, where the key priority is to become more and more attentive listeners to God, to others and the world.

The methodology of the Conversations of the Holy Spirit in our own Archdiocese and other parts of Australia and the world, has really helped us to discipline ourselves to be contemplative, relational and discerning. Then to courageously do all that functionally is required to "preach and serve the Gospels to the nations" especially the poor and oppressed. Let us recall with this in mind that "Being always precedes Doing." What we are looking for is the continuation of the "Cenacle of Pentecost" and not creating another type of "Tower of Babel" in our midst.

The third compass point pertains to the missionary impulse of all of us through our Baptism. The synodal journey sends us out into our troubled belligerent world of today as Missionary Disciples of the Resurrection.

The minority view here would simply say that synodality is to make our parish a more welcoming place.

Whereas this is true it is simply not enough. Let us be aware of this as we approach our next Assembly of the Archdiocese in August of this year.

The majority view would say that as Missionary Disciples of the Resurrection we are to fulfill, in our own time and place, the great commission of the Resurrected Jesus, "Go and make disciples of all the nations." (Matthew 28:19-20.)

This majority view takes seriously the humorously expressed observation of Pope Francis that the idea is not so much of letting the Holy Spirit into the Church but allowing the Holy Spirit to break out from the Church and go into the modern world with all of us. I think as we reflect on our own reception of synodality in our Archdiocese we have made a very good start. There is still much to be done.

When we bring these three compass points together, we can certainly see a great definition of evangelisation in our Catholic understanding emerging. We have been reminded so often over the last few years here in this Archdiocese and beyond: the impulse is for Encounter, Discipleship and Mission or using the terminology of this year, Get up! Listen! Go! Keeping these dimensions together in harmony in Christ really does make us an evangelising Archdiocese.

Putting all this rather foundational theological matter aside for a moment, I would now like to make some implications of this for the Clergy. Almost the entire presbyterate of the Archdiocese is here. We are here to bless the oils that the clergy will use in the coming year and shortly to renew our Priestly promises. In thanking the Priests, Deacons and Seminarians for their response to the Lord, we all understand that synodality is quite challenging for the clergy.

I suppose the key question starts to move towards the idea that with such a great stress on our common Baptism and co-responsibility of all the faithful today, where do the clergy fit into all this?

Perhaps a few thoughts are in order.

Firstly, speaking to the clergy quite directly, let us never forget that as shepherds we are also still sheep.

At the end of last year, I was invited to a major Asian International gathering of the Catholic Church in Malaysia. There were about 1,000 leaders of almost every Asian country in the Catholic world.

At one stage all the Bishops and Cardinals broke off into a workshop of their own. I suppose there was about two hundred of us there.

The topic was Synodality and three of the Cardinals gave us quite an erudite teaching on what this would mean for Bishops and shepherds of the flock in their respective Diocese.

Towards the end of their teaching, they asked one of the Asian Vatican Cardinals if he would like to make an observation about what they had said. He was reluctant to do so. But, under a bit of pressure he stood up and spoke spontaneously. What he said really, "softened the room" and I thought was a moment of the Holy Spirit. He said that in trying our best to be shepherds in a synodal Church, we must remember that we are also still sheep. He continued and said, we don't stop being sheep when we become Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

I thought his comment were very much of an anointed kind. If we fail to do that, we could really fuel the fires of clericalism which is exactly what we don't want to do. As I mentioned before, let us first of all start with Baptism where we all become sons and daughters of God. It is from this that we can view the Sacrament of Holy Orders in a different light.

A second reflection would come under the term differentiated co-responsibility. This rather convoluted term has now entered into our "synodal vocabulary."

It is true that the key to all this is what we have been saying in this Archdiocese for some years now, "All the Baptised, preaching all the Gospel, to all the people all the time."

But this does not mean that this is all done "all in the same way." There is a differentiated co-responsibility, according to our particular ministries in the Church.

We know from Saint Paul that the Holy Spirit offers all sorts of gifts and charisms to the People of God. It is a bit like an orchestra, where there is one orchestra producing a very pleasant sound, but it is made up of many different instruments. Another image may be of a garden, with beautiful flowers producing one garden but all the flowers are not of the one variety. How boring that would be.

So, precise responsibility of the priest of course is many fold but centres around leadership in the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and particularly the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the great gift of the Priest is given key focus. It is he during the Mass that re-presents Christ as Victim and Head of the Church.

In all of this we remain, as the preface of today's Mass will shortly proclaim, "Faithful stewards of the mysteries of God."

With the Lay faithful and not necessarily to the Lay faithful, the clergy offers leadership to advance the Kingdom of God in our time and place.

This is surely resonated in the Readings of today, especially from the Prophet Isaiah and Saint Luke's Gospel. Here the essential point is made, together as the orchestra or garden of God, that we are "to bring Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to proclaim the Lord's years of favour."

Thirdly, therefore the key ecclesiological foundation for the clergy is to serve all the Baptised.

This is a strong theme in a recent Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIV on the sixtieth anniversary of the Conciliar Decrees on the Priesthood, *Optatum Totius* and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*. It is called "A Fidelity that Generates The Future." (December 2025).

In this letter, and I will conclude with this, Pope Leo calls on the clergy, to live out their Sacrament of Holy Orders, in three key relationships.

Firstly, the "relationship with the bishop, who regards priests as indispensable helpers and advisers, and maintains with them a fraternal and friendly relationship."

Dear Brother Priests if that has not been your experience with me, then I ask for your forgiveness. Please pray for me in this Mass as you do in all Masses, praying for Leo our Pope and Christopher your Bishop.

Secondly, the Pope mentions the relationship of clergy with clergy. He says, so "that together they contribute to the same work and carry out the one priestly service, all working to the same purpose even when engaged in different tasks."

And finally, the Key relationship of the clergy with the Lay faithful. Pope Leo insists "there is a relationship with the lay faithful, among whom priests, with their specific responsibility, are brothers and share the same baptismal dignity, uniting their efforts with those of the lay faithful...(avoiding) seeking to dominate and take on all tasks themselves."

The Pope concludes with an honest assessment regarding synodality today. He says, "We have much to do in these areas but with a synodal turn in the Catholic Faith these three compass points are of particular importance."

So dear friends, all of us gathered here on this beautiful night where we celebrate the Christ Mass together, let us now pause for a time of attentive silence, reflecting over the momentous moment of Salvation history we are in and reflecting on the context of the different wars raging in the world and the discord and fragmentation of society even here in Australia. Let us do this in a spirit of humble service before our beloved priests, who we thank so much for all their incredible daily efforts, and renew their Priestly promises as we continue on with our Mass.