



Third Sunday of Lent

**Called to be a Christ-Centred Church that
is Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal**



Plenary Council 2020
Listen to what the Spirit is saying...

Introduction

This Lenten Program draws on the rich Scripture texts of this Year A Lenten Season, and invites us to reflect on these in conjunction with the Plenary Council 2020 themes, to discern what the Spirit is saying to us in our own local parish communities today.

The plenary theme that we will reflect on this week is **Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal**.

Inclusivity implies that all have a place, and that all are welcome. In today's Church, belonging, hospitality and welcome are key considerations, firmly grounded in Biblical teaching. Whether a newcomer to the parish returns will be based on a large part on the welcome and sense of belonging they have received. Our Catholic worship, for example, often seems to favour the personal and private, and yet it is a communal celebration. A friendly 'hello' and simple smile can be the difference for an individual between an isolating experience of the Mass and a warm one.

Greater participation of lay people within our parish communities is an area that has been strengthened since the Second Vatican Council. We have grown in the understanding that all the Baptised have each received gifts from the Holy Spirit that they are called to use to help build up the Kingdom of God. Further that this, the laity are called to exercise 'co-responsibility'. Pope Benedict says,

"Co-responsibility requires a change in mentality, particularly with regard to the role of the laity in the Church, who should be considered not as "collaborators" with the clergy, but as persons truly "co-responsible" for the being and activity of the Church. It is important, therefore, that a mature and committed laity be united, who are able to make their own specific contribution to the Church's mission."
Message on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action (10 August 2012)

However, often we don't have processes or models of leadership in place to allow parishioner's gifts and responsibilities to be identified, nurtured, and enabled within our communities to the benefit of all.

Finally, being 'synodal' means being a listening Church, where there are opportunities at all levels of Church to listen to each other and to the Holy Spirit. Your presence in this group today, and your participation in this wider parish conversation, is already a move towards greater inclusivity, participation and synodality.

Many blessings in your reflection.

Let's Gather and Pray Together (5 mins)



Gathering

Sit silently for a moment and come into God's presence. Know in confidence that Jesus is present when we gather in his name.

Plenary Council Prayer

**Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.**

**O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.**

**Give us the grace to see your face in one another
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.**

**Give us the courage to tell our stories
and to speak boldly of your truth.**



Give us ears to listen humbly to each other
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.

Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
bread for the journey from age to age.

Amen.

*Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.*



This Week's Theme: Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal (5 mins)

Below is a short overview paragraph of this theme which arose from the first phase of the Plenary Council process, Phase 1: Listening & Dialogue. Read this quietly now to give context to our gathering. What are you drawn to? What thoughts or images are arising for you? You may wish to underline words or phrases.

This National Theme for Discernment is inspired by the voices of the People of God who expressed a desire for individuals and groups within and also beyond the Church to find a better welcome and be incorporated more into her life and mission. There was a call to renew forms of governance and leadership in the Church, to find ways formally and informally of being co-responsible for ministry and mission, seeking structures and processes of collaboration, shared decision-making and financial co-responsibility in order to enable this greater involvement of lay people particularly of women, young people, people of diverse cultural backgrounds and people with disabilities. There was an expressed need for stronger connections across the many parts of the Church, and with other Christian traditions.

Excerpt from Snapshot Report – How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is: Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal.

*The full Snapshot Report is available online at
<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/reports/#snapshotreports>*

Let's Reflect (5 mins)

We now turn to this week's Scripture passage, the Gospel for the Third Week of Lent from John Chapter 4
- The Woman at the Well.

Read Gospel passage twice

1. One person from the group reads the Scripture passage aloud.
2. After 2 minutes of silence, a second person from the group reads the Scripture passage aloud again.

John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him,

and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Individual Silent Reflection (20 mins)

Take time now to reflect individually in silence, pray with the scripture passage you have heard, and reflect on the information about the National Theme for Discernment "Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal". Some initial thoughts are offered below.

During this time of silence, consider the questions below. You may wish to journal, to draw or simply sit quietly with your thoughts.

- How is God speaking to you in this scripture and all that you have read?
- What words or phrases are you being drawn to and why?
- How do you feel?



Some Initial Thoughts



In Biblical times, Jews and Samaritans were not close friends; and neither was it culturally appropriate for a man to greet a woman in public.

Seen in this light, Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in this week's Gospel crosses quite a few barriers. As in every encounter that Jesus had with another, he always saw the 'person' first, and he was always aware of their needs. Even though he asked the woman for water, he knew it was she who needed life-giving water.

This meeting speaks of Jesus' passionate inclusivity – always ready to welcome each and every person and calling them to be transformed in God's life-changing love.

This chance meeting at a well was, strikingly, one of the few occasions where Jesus actually stated who he is, not to a religious leader, but to a Samaritan woman. "I am he." Jesus is the Messiah.

This revelation generates such excitement in the woman, that she is compelled to invite the townspeople, which would include family, friends and neighbours, to come and also experience what she has discovered. This unlikely evangelist takes up her place in bringing the Good News, in sharing in the work of the Kingdom. She does this immediately, with little preparation, and with great zeal. Her ministry was not a laborious task. Rather, after encountering Jesus, she is sharing her joy.

And surprisingly, many do come, leading to their own transformation. This is a message open to every person, a message that can't be contained.

As we reflect on what it means to be an inclusive, participatory and synodal Church, we pray for a renewed invitational, welcoming and inclusive spirit amongst all our people, and for greater opportunities for every person to be involved and active in sharing their gifts so that our parishes can fulfil their purpose as bearers of the Good News to all people.

Sharing & Listening – Round 1 (15 mins)



Each person in the group is invited to share aloud the fruits of your individual prayer and to say how you are feeling using the lead-in statements below (2-3 minutes each).

Take care to allow everyone in the group to respond as and when they are ready; and keep in mind, that when others are speaking, to listen with an open and humble heart.

**"In my prayer today...
And I feel..."**

Reflect (5 mins)

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about what you have heard the people in your group say, and ask yourself: "What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?"

Sharing & Listening - Round 2 (15 mins)



Each person is invited to share with the group from their reflection (approx. 2 minutes each). What have you heard the Spirit saying in the voices of the group? Use the lead-in statements below.

This time when sharing, do not add anything new to the conversation – just your response to what you have heard already shared.

**"Listening to the Holy Spirit through the voices of this group, I have heard..."
"And it leaves me feeling..."**

Reflect (5 mins)

Once everybody has shared, the whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about how you are feeling and about your experience of prayer and listening today.

Sharing & listening - Round 3 (10 mins)



This third round of sharing and listening is open, and less structured than the previous two rounds. The purpose of open conversation is to deepen your encounter with one another. Any person who wants to speak is invited to share. During this time, remember to listen deeply when someone else is speaking, and to respond to the conversation with an open and kind heart.

In light of all you have experienced today, share your thoughts and feelings with the group. When sharing, you might like to begin with these words:

“From our prayer and conversation today, and thinking about how God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal...”

When the time is right, close the conversation by saying thank you to one another for sharing before taking a short break. Remember to note the time to get back together after the break.

Coffee break (10 mins)

Thinking Locally – Individual Silent Reflection (5 mins)



Take some time now, to reflect on any ideas which might be acted upon locally, in your own lives, in parishes, communities or schools or in other parts of your local neighbourhood. Think about who you can collaborate with locally. This part is your call to faith in action, living out the Gospel for God's mission.

The whole group reflects in silence for 5 minutes. During this time, think about the concrete, practical steps which could be taken to move your community forward to be more Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal. You may wish to use Post-It notes to record ideas.

- **What ideas do we have that can nourish our local faith community?**

Thinking Locally – Sharing and Listening Whole Group (15 mins)

Everyone is invited to share their ideas with the group. If you have used Post-It notes, place these in the centre of the group as you speak about them. When others are sharing their ideas, remember to listen with an open and humble heart.

Once everyone has shared their ideas for action, your group's task is to identify 2 or 3 emerging actions that can form the group's submission to your Parish and Community leaders. Below are some questions to guide your group's discernment:

- **What actions do we feel strongly called towards?**
- **What actions could really help us to move toward becoming a Christ-centred Church that is Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal?**
- **What is the most loving response that the Spirit is calling us to?**



Give Thanks



Let us conclude in prayer:

Loving God, author of all gifts;

We praise and thank you for all the gifts you have entrusted to us.

Pour out your Spirit upon us so that, true to our baptismal promises, we may form faith communities that recognise and promote the gifts in all people so that we may all share in the mission of Jesus.

Inspire us to be a Church that is welcoming and accepting, and which sees everyone as an expression of Christ.

May our faith communities nurture and commission all members to live our particular gifts as a reflection and imitation of Jesus' life.

Give us the courage to be the light of welcome in the darkness of exclusion, a voice of gentleness in the wilderness of the unheard and an outstretched hand of love to those longing for community. Amen.

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