



Fourth Sunday of Lent

**Called to be a Christ-Centred Church that
is Humble, Healing and Merciful**



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 **Humble, Healing and Merciful**. The feeling of needing to lament is a very biblical response in times of crisis and is at the same time a feeling in the hearts of many in the Church today.

We cry out in grief at the brokenness we see in the Church, in the world, and sometimes in ourselves. There is indeed much to lament, and yet, within the biblical Psalms, wherever deep lament is expressed, there often follows a glimmer of hope in the promise of God. This one verse in Psalm 42 (v.11) captures this well:

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

There is a trust that healing will come, that God is bigger than the troubles and the distress. We are invited to take this trust into our prayer for healing in the Church today, in all the areas of brokenness and division. This applies both at a communal level, and at a personal one.

Pope Francis is always keen to remind us of God's abundant mercy. Indeed, the word 'mercy' has come to define his pontificate. Ours is a God who is forever calling us back into God's loving embrace and desiring to shower us with grace. Our God is a God who seeks our wellbeing and healing.

Lent is a time to move towards accepting this grace and healing. When we turn to God in acknowledgement of our brokenness, we allow God, who is ever ready to meet us where we are at, to enter and begin the healing process. This is the great gift that all Christians are encouraged to share with the world – the abundant mercy of God for every person.

In our Pope's words, 'Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven.'

This session reflects particularly on the topics of healing from the abuse crisis; better relationships within the Church and with the wider society; and ways to reach out to bring healing and mercy to all.

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: Humble, Healing and Merciful (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 deep and faith-filled trust in God and a need for lament and healing within the Church, acknowledging the sexual abuse crisis as a turning point for the Church in Australia. It identified the need for relationship and reconciliation among many within the Catholic community, and with the wider Australian society, particularly with Australia's First Peoples and with all of creation. A desire was expressed for stronger prayer and sacramental life and more effective outreach to those who seek healing, as a renewed openness to and sign of God's mercy.

*Excerpt from Snapshot Report – How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:
Humble, Healing and Merciful.*

*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 Fourth Week of Lent from John Chapter 9
– The Man Born Blind.

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 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud

on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.'

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 "Humble, Healing and Merciful". 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



This passage recounts the marvellous healing of a man born blind, and the desire of Jesus to meet him, take time to work with him, and ultimately bring him healing. Jesus doesn't just pass the man by but, instead, stops to tend to his need. At the end of the passage, knowing that the man was being chastised for his belief in him, Jesus intentionally searches him out, like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep. Jesus' heart was always for the outcast, the forgotten, and the smallest among them.

This desire to bring healing is clear throughout the life of Jesus, and reflects our loving God who desires our wholeness and flourishing. This Good News of a loving and merciful God is a great gift to be shared, as every person needs healing in some way, whether physical or spiritual.

How can we bring this healing heart to our communities, and be instruments of God's healing grace? We may look at how we can be more aware of people's needs in our community, and how to seek out those who experience brokenness in so many ways. We may look at our responses to these needs and what we could offer. We notice that Jesus' response in this passage is substantial, with practical action and follow-up. His accompaniment of the man over a period of time is a good model for us.

Another aspect in this passage is the division within the community. There was an inability by some to hear the truth of the blind man's words and the blessing present there. It reminds us to reflect on whether we listen to all the voices within our community; and where there may be places of disunity or discord which need attention at this time.

As we reflect on what it means to be a humble, healing and merciful Church, we pray that God's grace and healing will flow through our parishes and Church to restore and to transform, both communally and individually; and for the humility to listen deeply to each other as we journey together.

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 Humble, Healing and Merciful...”

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 Humble, Healing and Merciful. 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 or 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 Humble, Healing and Merciful?**
- **What is the most loving response that the Spirit is calling us to?**



Give Thanks



Let us conclude in prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the
heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew
from being enslaved by money;
the Magdalene from seeking happiness
only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us,
the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”
You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by
forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its
Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be
clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those
in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought
after, loved, and forgiven by God.
Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us
with its anointing,
so that your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may
bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.
We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession
of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

Amen.

Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee (adapted)

Prepared by the Catholic Life & Faith Formation team, Office for Evangelisation, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay. The Office for Evangelisation is available to assist parishes with parish planning and parish renewal initiatives. Please contact evangelisation@bbcatholic.org.au