



Fifth Sunday of Lent

**Called to be a Christ-Centred Church
that is Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform**



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 **Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform**. You may be familiar with the following quote from Pope Francis from November 2015 to the Italian Church, “Today we are not living an era of change, but a change of era.”

With continual and extensive change unfolding in society, the Church must seek ways to be able to speak the unchanging Good News of Jesus Christ in fresh and relevant ways so that it can be received meaningfully by those who hear it. A ‘business as usual’ approach is failing us right now.

Pope Francis speaks of a “creative fidelity”, of being faithful to the Gospel but also open to the perennial newness of the Gospel. He speaks of the Church as “being implanted and rooted in Christ, allowing herself to be led by the Spirit. Thus everything will be possible with genius and creativity.” We should not be afraid of the challenges ahead, but tackle them head on, founded in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Change can be both personal and communal – personally, seeking conversion and turning back to God more faithfully; and communally, seeking renewal in the way we do things and considering reform in our structures, governance and processes that assist us in our mission.

This is where ‘discernment’ is called for – to guide us in the way forward where it is not always clear how to respond, or which is the best step to take. Let’s go forward in confidence in our loving God and open to where the journey will lead us.

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: Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform (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 to do things differently in response to Christ and the experience of our people, accepting that faithfulness to tradition requires change that is both personal and communal. Respondents also affirmed the important role of the clergy, expressing their appreciation for their vocation and recognising the need for support and ongoing formation and accompaniment. Some asked for a consideration of alternative approaches to ordained ministry, some for a greater inclusion of laity and different groups in the Church's life, some for new models of governance and leadership, and some for a renewed fidelity to the Church's teachings. There was also a call for a renewed life of prayer and communion with one another, including understanding the many different ways in which we encounter God and experience a conversion of heart.

*Excerpt from Snapshot Report – How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church that is:
Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform.*

*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 Fifth Week of Lent from John Chapter 11 – The Raising of Lazarus.

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 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of

this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

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 "Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform". 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 this passage we see revealed by Jesus the heart of our great story as Christians, that life has overcome death, and that no matter how difficult things become, our God can act to bring something new out of the darkness. This is God's work - to restore, to show mercy, to forgive, to care for, to draw people into loving relationship, to heal, to bring wholeness, to give new life. In short, God wants to build God's Kingdom, just as Jesus showed us in person.

Remembering that it is God's work and not only ours gives us great encouragement going forward. We are participants in this great drama, and our collaboration brings it about. It is through our hands and hearts that God works to make God's dream a reality. This same God who raised Lazarus (and Jesus) from the dead is working through us and our parishes to breathe new life.

Whatever renewal and reform that takes place will inevitably involve change and will be accompanied by a letting go. We can't change and still have everything the way it has always been. This letting go and not clinging to the ways we have always done things can be like a kind of dying which can prepare the way for newness to emerge. If necessary, are we ready to dismantle in order to rebuild? What needs to be re-organised so that our parish can be life-giving to all people?

Let's continue our mission - to make Jesus known and loved - the best we can. The Spirit will find new ways, even if we don't know yet what they will be.

As we reflect on what it means to be a Church that is Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform, we keep to heart Jesus' words, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" and go forward in confidence as difficult as it may sometimes seem.

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 Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform...”

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 Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform. 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 Open to Conversion, Renewal and Reform?**
- **What is the most loving response that the Spirit is calling us to?**



Give Thanks



Let us conclude in prayer:

God our Father, you have called us
to be witnesses to Jesus
and have commissioned us to lead
all people to encounter him.

Send your Holy Spirit
to enlighten our minds
so that your will may be clear to us
and that we may accept it.

Dwell within our souls
and make our hearts your own.
Transform us into a band of
joyful missionary disciples
so as to share the good news
of Jesus Christ in our communities
through joyful evangelisation and service.

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful,
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Amen

Mary Star of the Sea, pray for us

From the Archdiocese of Detroit website www.aod.org

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.
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