



A PLENARY COUNCIL FOR A MISSION AND CHRIST CENTRED CHURCH

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Warmest greetings and blessings following the Second Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia held in Sydney.

You will have read and heard from many voices during and since the Plenary. So, I add my reflections to those of others, as I begin to imagine the way forward from all that occurred in the “upper room”. This is where 277 bishops, priests, deacons, lay women and men gathered in prayerful dialogue and discernment on the Motions and Amendments and final Decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council.

We are all aware that the undertaking of the Plenary Council was years in the making. It was an extraordinary honour to be a Member and to experience the voices, honesty, prayerfulness and lived faith experience of so many people gathered from across Australia. At the heart of the process were the many tables of members who sat respectfully listening, engaging, sharing their experiences, reflecting on their faith and discipleship as followers of Christ. There were many moments of laughter, joy, hope, sadness and even tears. Throughout the plenary, I was seated on Table One and was blessed by the presence of two religious women, two lay men, a lay indigenous woman, a fellow bishop and a religious priest. Each of them shared so powerfully from their personal experience, leadership, knowledge, faith in Jesus Christ and love of the Church – we were united in one faith, one baptism, one Lord (Ephesians 4:5).

You will have heard or read commentary on the significant moment which occurred on Wednesday morning following the deliberative vote on Part 4: Witnessing to the Equal Dignity of Women and Men. It was a time which I will never forget for many reasons, but more so for the profound sense I had of the disciples in their upper room, who had gathered awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) and how they were shaken from their fear, worry and anxiety to be set free by the promised Advocate. It is clear that the process of the Plenary Assembly had reached a pivotal point which could have either ruptured the process altogether or strengthened the way forward. If it had not been for the extraordinary leadership of Bishop Shane Mackinlay, the excellent facilitator of the session and the engagement of Members, the outcome would have been dire. Yet it was clarity of Christ-like leadership, depth of feeling, hope, faith and goodwill which led the Assembly to transcend to a new level of theological imagination through the gift of grace – it was a moment when the assembly truly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit alive and active in our midst.



Only through the lens of faith can I interpret what occurred on that day and the days which followed. It was as though we were lifted to see things anew and beyond, to place our trust in the goodwill which had gathered across this land and an invitation for us to re-engage in the process with passion, honesty, hope and faith; not for ourselves alone but for those who had placed so much faith and hope into the process of the Plenary journey over the past four years. The Plenary Council was a huge step forward for the Church in Australia. It has shown us the reality of the paschal mystery – dying and rising – is truly part of our lives as a Church and one of which we should not be afraid. The Plenary Council has enabled us to experience the call of Pope Francis to be a synodal Church which journeys together as a pilgrim and missionary People of God.

I can speak on behalf of the other Members from the Diocese of Sale that we were honoured to have been entrusted with the responsibility, and thankful to participate in this rich experience of the Catholic Church in Australia. The week was enriched by the warmth of welcome and acknowledgement of country each day; the thoughtful liturgies which enabled the participation of all, and explored the use of music, poetry, prayer and our sense of union with the modern world in all her hope, joy, anxiety and grief; the daily Eucharist; and the delightful hospitality which was extended to every member in so many thoughtful, kind, compassionate and generous ways.

The Second Assembly ended with the endorsement of Decrees which will move toward promulgation. They set a course for us to heal, to listen; to form hearts and minds in Christ; to welcome all and those on the peripheries; to accompany other Christians and those from other faiths and so much more. It is a beginning point as the entire Church in Australia as she seeks to embody what has emerged into pastoral initiatives so that we can become more mission orientated and more Christ-like. I encourage you to reflect on the Decrees found on our website: www.cdsale.org.au.

Our Diocesan *Gaudium et Spes* committee will now reflect on how we begin to implement the Decrees at a parish and diocesan level. I look forward to opportunities to reflect how we consider and enact the Decrees across the Diocese of Sale in collaboration with my brother priests and deacons, religious, Chancery of the Diocese, parishioners, Catholic education and every aspect of Church life. The real work now begins anew in our shared mission in the image of Christ.

May we continue the great work which has begun and entrust all that we will do under the care of our patroness Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Bishop Greg Bennet
Bishop of Sale
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