

'BEING ON THE OUTER AND A NEW CHURCH MODEL' – HOMILY - 26 November 2017

Today's Gospel Matthew 25:

THE LAST JUDGEMENT STORY OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

WE RETURN TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Let us look to the Gospel of Matthew and the parables we have heard there–

- the [WHEAT AND WEEDS](#) in Matthew Chapter 13
- the [NET WITH A CATCH OF GOOD AND BAD FISH](#) in Chapter 13
- the [FIVE WISE BRIDESMAIDS AND THE FIVE FOOLISH BRIDESMAIDS](#) in Chapter 25
- the [FIVE AND TWO TALENTS THAT MULTIPLY AND ONE TALENT BURIED](#) in Chapter 25

Each of these parables and stories gives us a **contrast**.

From each contrast we learn; each has a lesson; each is a guide.

JESUS AND HIS PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR.

In today's Gospel we witness **not only charity, but relationship**.

The Last Judgement story relates:

***"All the nations will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.***

Then the king will say to those at his right hand,

***"Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
for I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me."***

JESUS BRINGS US TOGETHER AS FAMILY

We see people who are on the **outer**.

The hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, prisoners.

And we are related to them,

they, the outsiders are really family.

Jesus brings us together as family.

Jesus not only welcomes the outsiders, he dines with them.

He accepts them. He heals them. He defends them.

Matthew's account continues, as the king says:

***"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least
of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."***

It is easy to adopt a handout mentality, but is that all Jesus means? No.

The Gospel is much deeper than that.

OUR CALL TO LOVE

Our call is to respect and love our neighbour and thereby love God.

- *Giving food to the hungry*
- *Giving drink to the thirsty*
- *Welcoming the stranger*
- *Clothing the naked*
- *Caring for the sick*
- *Visiting the prisoner*

These are some of the ways of loving neighbour, of being merciful.
Not all of the ways - some of the ways.

Jesus goes further to suffer, die and rise from the dead.

**TO WHAT WAY, IN OUR LOVING OF OUR NEIGHBOUR,
ARE WE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR THEM?**

TO ADVOCATE FOR THEM, TO BE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEM.

Jesus not only advocates for us,

He was born into our world in solidarity with us, present among us.

Not only in solidarity,

But every time we ignore and isolate and demean others,

We do it to Jesus.

THE AUSTRALIAN CHURCH

**AND IN A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE, WHO IS ON THE OUTER TODAY IN THE AUSTRALIAN
CHURCH?**

**LIKE IN THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS, WHOSE TALENT DO WE BURY IN THE GROUND OR
UNDERFOOT?**

REFLECTING ON THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS – SOME QUESTIONS

Reflecting on the parable of the sheep and goats,

WHOSE HUNGER DO WE NOT SATISFY?

WHOSE THIRST DO WE NOT QUENCH?

WHOSE POVERTY DO WE NOT CLOTHE?

WHOSE ILLNESS DO WE SEEK TO HEAL?

WHO DOES NOT FEEL FULLY WELCOME?

WHO IS IMPRISONED IN ANY WAY AND WE NOT VISIT?

And from other parts of the Gospel,

WHO IS NOT LOVED WITHIN OR WITHOUT THE CHURCH COMMUNITY?

WHO IS NOT TREATED JUSTLY?

TO WHOM DO WE NOT LOVE WITH MERCY?

Marginalised, sexually abused, and discriminated.

Fr Noel Connolly SSC, a member of the Plenary Council Facilitation Team, recently wrote an article about preparation for the 2020 national Catholic Plenary Council entitled, "Listening to God by listening to one another"

WHAT MODEL OF CHURCH DO WE SEEK?

WHERE ALL BAPTISED ARE CHURCH JOURNEYING TOGETHER?

I invite you to take a break from the homily, and read his article.

And then to return to some of the insights that people have sent me on his article.

HOW DO WE ALL, AS BAPTISED MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH FAMILY, SHARE NOT ONLY OUR GIFTS AND TALENTS, BUT ALSO SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY AND DECISION-MAKING?

Some have shared which passages in the article stand out for them.

Some have replied by highlighting paragraphs or sentences or phrases that they believe or critique.

Some like the whole article.

Responses included thoughts and quotes and poetry.

Quotes on Conviction, Commitment and Courage,

Poems on Gospel Joy and Solidarity.

Thank you to all who shared.

Some of the points from the reflections are below.

I have highlighted some of their wording.

Pope Francis since 2013 has been calling on us to be **a humble, merciful, loving and synodal church.**

Let us pray and listen and journey together.

Fr Gerry

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM PEOPLE IN BRISBANE ON FR. NOEL'S ARTICLE AND THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

FROM RESPONSE 1

*"I particularly liked the theme of **"journeying together and all listening to one another"**, and Noel Connolly's mention of where he sees **"the promise"** of the plenary council – **"having plenty of encounters"** at all levels.*

*I really liked his summing up that, **"If we are generous, joyful and open we may survive the hurts and misunderstandings and get to know and enjoy one another."***

I believe we have to constantly pray to be open to the Holy Spirit, trust that the Spirit is there among us in our listening and our speaking and our silence and our confusion and our grief and our frustration and our imagination and our joy and our peace.

*One thing I did wonder about was **"Inverting the Pyramid"**.*

I would tend to hope that the pyramid would be flattened so that no one would be on top or on the bottom, but all walking together, serving one another for the common good.

FROM RESPONSE 2

1. ... our identity as the pilgrim people of God.

Which is exciting: it is an image of church that speaks of a discipleship of committed equality, and inclusion. Pilgrims travel- lightly! It's a challenge and opportunity.

2. A healthy and well-nourished 'sense of the faithful' is essential if we are serious about being Church in as 'pilgrim people of God'.

Again, I hear this as energizing and affirming: as the faith of each baptized person is nourished, the faith of the Church is nourished.

Each of us matters.

The richness includes shadowy truths too: we can't celebrate this joy of the value of each member of the people of God, without noting that the inverse is also true...

where the faith of one of the people of God is diminished, devalued, neglected, or excluded, so too is the faith of the church. (Which connects with #3)

3. Noel emphasizes the importance of listening to each other. I heartily agree; 'tis essential...

To my mind, it's a bit grittier than his phrasing: "If we are generous, joyful and open we may survive the hurts and misunderstandings and get to know, respect and enjoy one another."

That might apply to misunderstandings, but it doesn't really cut it when **addressing sinful structures that are part of our reality as Church in Australia.**

(Though, it maybe that Noel knows, better than I, how to gently coax along his readers!)

It's hard to grasp just how radical the call to listen to each other actually is.

I like John May's phrase; **respectful authentic dialogue**

"is not the soft option but the hard edge".

For me, this is perhaps the trickiest part of the Christian call to community and discipleship.

How do we know we have really listened?

Who is benefiting from the listening, and who is not?

Where, and by whom, is the boundary line drawn - who is "in" and who is "out" of the collective we are committed to listen to and with?

4. Noel's last paragraph is great: "We need each other.

Women and lay people have insights, sensitivities, imagination and skills that are powerful, complementary and cannot be done without. It is the future.

It is not only theologically desirable but we may find unexpected joy and life in a synodal church."

Yes, we do need each other... and like Noel, I have faith in the joys that will ensue as we become better practiced at this. ...

We can't rush past the sorrows and sadness's that exist as a result of 'the way things were' – and still are for many.

This is a slow journey of thousands of hearts, each of which is equally important to a flourishing sense of the faithful.

On the issue of gender and language, for example, Noel's affirmation of complementary gifts in the church could easily be heard by many women as a very unequal kind of affirmation.

I am a fan of Veronica Lawson's call for "**a new paradigm of gender mutuality rather than complementary**."

For far too long, and with a very, very weak academic and theological basis, the language of 'complementarity' has been deeply problematic- and often co-opted for oppressive ends.

FROM RESPONSE 3

What a great article Noel Connolly has written. ... **the labels** we use in the Church. ... we have been drawn away from our understanding of and participation in **Church as the People of God**. Instead our consciousness has been taken to thinking of Church as the institution. I think this is reflected in Noel's article. Pope Francis is calling on the Church to be a listening Church. We do need to 'listen with the ear of the heart' to each person; each person has a voice and each person needs to be open to the Holy Spirit.

I could have highlighted the whole article. It is written so simply and beautifully. I have highlighted the pieces that I think would speak to people at this time.

I was thinking as I read and highlighted that it is the feast of Christ the King this Sunday – which can take us to that hierarchical and royal, almost privileged image.

Jesus was counter-cultural and presents us with the notion of King as servant, as being of service, reaching out to those at the margins, the poor, the lonely, the exiled. I think our Church (so each of us) is -

called to be a Church that is humble and compassionate and forgiving.

A Church that is focussed on our mission to reach out to the poor, to give voice to those who have no voice and to set the captives free can be **a sign of mercy to a world in need of hope.**

FROM RESPONSE 4

For me the significant and helpful part is that of **encounter**.

This weekend's Gospel is all about it, but, in the way we traditionally understand it – encounter with the less fortunate as a means to encountering and serving Jesus and changing people's lives.

Naturally, that is important. But the idea that that similar sense of encounter can also lead to a change in the model of church - less division and a greater sense that we are a unity of the people of God - well I think that gives some hope (of the realistic kind).

FROM RESPONSE 5

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to voice an opinion.

It is very exciting and makes me develop my understanding of the **Pope's emphasis on a synodal church**.

It is also clearly done in the spirit of the article...

The last paragraph is the most powerful and there are many sentences there that are important.

I was most struck by the second to last sentence.

Any group, family, government, business or church acts most dynamically when discussions **include wisdom from both genders and all ages.**

What a joyful time to be Catholic!

FROM RESPONSE 6

What a great article! I think one of the most important sections in the article is

"All the baptised people share in the prophetic, priestly and kingly offices of Christ.

Everything stems from Baptism.

All the baptised must share in the responsibility of decision making and follow through.

I however, am not convinced that the Bishops will listen to what the lay people have to say.

Pope Francis insists that we must invert the pyramid - fantastic!

FROM RESPONSE 7

Laity is insider jargon word of the Church....

We have interpreted it as Lay as in Lay back and let others think and act for us.

Letting our interaction with God be through others. The religious have abetted us in this.

The word needs to be dropped.

We are all the people of God and are each responsible to God for our actions.

Following blindly is the action of children and puppies not adults.

How can we know and love God if we make no effort to learn about God ...

Jesus called primarily the **humble and lowly.**

I would prefer to stamp the pyramid of power flat....

We all need to be challenged by the prophets among us.

Remember St Paul confronting St Peter and St Catherine of Siena confronting the Pope.

They call us to change, to stop and reassess our life.

They are **unsettling but necessary** to keep us and the Church in touch with God.

The Church is diverse in its people and in the expressions of their belief in God.

It is not our responsibility to judge others but it is our responsibility to see God in them.

We are not gingerbread cut with the same cutter we are all different but we are all tied together in God. Amen.

Fr Gerry

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Being on the Outer & A New Church Model – 26 November 2017]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/112617.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook26112017>]

Other:

Fr Noel Connolly SSC is a member of the Plenary Council Facilitation Team.

"Listening to God by listening to one another" is the article referred to in this homily.

Fr. Noel has written articles pertaining to Plenary 2020 - available on our [Plenary 2020 page](#).