

3 October 2021

Opening Eucharist – 3 October 2021

Blog by Francis Sullivan, CSSA Chair

In today's opening Eucharist Archbishop Tim Costello stressed that we are a Pilgrim People. For me, this means being a community humble enough to keep seeking the truth. To keep striving for authentic ways to relate to each other; to those who are not in the community and to those who feel at odds with the community.

As I participated in the mass online, I couldn't help but be reminded of the diversity of ways Catholics identify these days. Some practice in conventional ways. Others find their religious expression through good works and community services. Others still have found nurture and sustenance in specific movements and spiritualities, including being involved with social justice groups, refugee support and meditation communities.

We know that nearly 90 per cent don't attend regular weekend worship. But it doesn't mean that they still don't value a spiritual search and are not embarked on a life of meaning and service. Often they find real congruency between their religious values and the life choices, daily decisions that mark their place in the world and their disposition to others.

The variety of Catholic identities is a healthy sign of a Church on the move. It shows that to be Catholic is to be adaptable to the times. It shows a willingness to embrace the social context and work with the cultural parameters that often define how ordinary people find ways to navigate the questions of life. It is what Pope Francis means when he calls for a Church that 'goes to the streets', relates 'at the margins', has 'the smell of the sheep'.

As we assemble to discern what God is asking of the Church in Australia, I want to be ever mindful of the diversity of Catholicism in Australia. I want to resist being caught up in an image of Catholicism that is 'too white bread', too conventional. Rather I hope the Assembly can recognise the varieties of 'being Catholic' and affirm people on that journey.

And related to that are the various voices from the diverse corners of our Catholic community.

Throughout the consultation period leading to this Assembly many voices called for particular issues to be addressed by the Plenary Council. Such as the central concern of the full participation of women in governance and ministry. Groups like Catholic Social Services Victoria have suggested that an additional agenda item, Justice and Equity, should be included. Whether it will or not is unclear. Surely the organisers should address this upfront.

We have been told that those voices have been heard. We have also been told that the issues will be addressed in the course of the Plenary Council. Yet the current agenda is less specific. We are told not to stress, that it will all be accommodated.

Well, tomorrow morning in the first plenary session, broadcast live, the formal agenda will be approved.

Members can ask for clarifications or make specific interventions of concern. To do so, members flag any intervention with the Steering Group the night before. I have asked the group to consider informing all the Plenary Council members how specific issues raised in the consultations will actually be able to be discussed and voted on. Hopefully, the answer will be there for all to see!

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