

# PASTORAL LETTER OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHER PROWSE

## **BREATHE IN .... BREATHE OUT**

### **ON EVANGELISATION AND THE PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

***“...Receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses .... to earth’s remotest end.” (Acts 1/8)***

#### **WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION – PROPOSING NOT IMPOSING**

We are to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

It is like breathing. There is a breathing in. There is a breathing out. We breathe in the life and power of the Holy Spirit as we renew our Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist (RECEIVE!). We breathe out the Holy Spirit when we witness Jesus to all (GO!).

We call this evangelisation. It is something we PROPOSE to the world.

It is the opposite of IMPOSING on others. When we impose, we proselytise. People rightly feel troubled by this. Catholics, when true to our ancient Tradition, never impose the Good News of Jesus on anyone. At the same time, as St Peter encourages, we must “always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have.” (1Peter 3/15)

Evangelisation is not SOMETHING we teach. It is SOMEONE (Jesus) we propose by witnessing in all sorts of ways – only sometimes verbally, especially in personal testimony. As St Pope Paul VI put it in 1975, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975, 41)

Witnessing to the Resurrection has continued since the pouring down of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is evident in what is said and in our actions, especially with the poor. It is seen in our prayers and celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Mass. The love we share with each other and the world gives further examples. We see it in our poetry, iconography, music and architecture. We are attentive to subtle evangelisation taking place in marriages and families, in education, health and social services. We include too our workplaces and neighbourhoods.

#### **CONVERSION AND PROCLAMATION**

It is not only a matter of breathing in and out the Holy Spirit. It is also a cycle. It is like Jesus with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). There is a cycle from being evangelised to becoming a witness to the Resurrection. The entire Church must participate constantly in this evangelising cycle. It requires repentance and conversion, deep prayerful listening within and humility with others, courage and love in everything. It is open to learn from our theological creeds and our biblical/sacramental life.

Evangelisation, too, is not simply between persons within our own religious circles and “to earth’s remotest end.” It is also a saving proclamation to the cultures and sub-cultures of society. This includes the worlds of science and social media. Also the worlds of sport and corporate governance. Included too are the world’s hunger for dialogue, winning the

peace in political conflicts, and speaking the depths of full truth in ethical conversations too often based on half-truths. It involves collaborating in mercy and justice with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It means talking seriously about integral ecology.

All such panoramas of human longing are the new horizons of evangelisation today. It is where the Kingdom of God awaits to bud forth. Our humble efforts locate where the Holy Spirit is already present. We then do all we can to propose deeper encounter with Jesus and promote "Thy Kingdom Come".

### **ALL THE BAPTISED**

All of us are involved in the work. As Pope Francis teaches: "all the baptised, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, 120). In essence, it begins by a mutual listening. There is respect offered. Everyone has something to learn. This walking or journeying together is the essence of what is called "synodality". From discerning together, we move to acting together.

### **THE PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

This is precisely what is happening already with the Plenary Council of Australia. We have been journeying together for a few years now. The two national assemblies are approaching. We are praying for a renewal of a Christ-centred Church at the service of humanity. We travel with Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians. St Mary Mackillop is our model of Australian discipleship.

### **..... IN RECENT YEARS**

It is time to renew our life in the Archdiocese in the light of the Plenary Council and respond within our Catholic Tradition with courage and hope.

I believe the Holy Spirit is already "budding forth" afresh in this Archdiocese in its parishes and communities in so many ways. The following, in no way exhaustive, come immediately to mind:

A healthy society means healthy families. The Archdiocese has initiated wonderful practical pastoral initiatives that **renew families and mentor marriages** in the Christian vision.

Somewhat unexpectedly, **the youth apostolate** in the Archdiocese is blossoming. The youth are more and more belonging to "safe havens" where Jesus is encountered and the Catholic faith is explained in a persuasive manner. It is a methodology of youth evangelising youth to "belong, believe and become".

The Covid pandemic still causes so much heartache. Yet, paradoxically, it is opening up so many new pastoral avenues via **social media** to witness to the Resurrection. Our *Catholic Voice*, for example, is now not simply in magazine form but in daily and weekly digital formats that truly nourish faith. These new formats are very popular.

There is a worldwide movement for greater accountability and transparency. This is especially the case in Australia due to the damning Royal Commission into sex abuse of minors. It is clear that the Archdiocese is developing growing sophistication in the area of **administration and governance issues**. This is especially seen in the areas of professional standards and closer links between the parishes and the Archdiocesan administration.

The continuing influx of **wonderful migrant families and new ecclesial groups** into the Archdiocese is such a special blessing of the Holy Spirit on us all. Often coming from countries of origin where Christianity is suppressed, they are strong in their faith and ready to witness to us all their love of the Catholic Church.

## **..... IN RECENT TIMES**

In our Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, we have just completed four consultations in our deaneries reflecting on our Church through the prism of the "Continuing the Journey" working document. This national document has summarised and shaped our reflections on the Plenary Council so far. Our reflections have been respectful. We are really trying to discern in a communal manner. This is new to us.

I have listened to others on the lights and shadows of passing on the faith in this Archdiocese in our times. So many good things and challenges were shared. The following were of particular note. There are the various pastoral contexts of the rural and city parishes, the love of our parishes, priests and the sacraments, the role of women in our Church, the importance of youth, sex abuse challenges, the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Peoples, governance issues, the opportunities of social media, and so on. All of this was expressed in the current social situation of the Covid 19 pandemic.

## **MANY STEPPING-STONES AHEAD**

Our faith journey continues in trust of the Holy Spirit. There are many significant stepping-stones ahead for us. The national Plenary Council looms immediately on the horizon. Then there is the follow up back in our Archdiocese. Where is the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us nationally, in the Archdiocese, and in our parishes/deaneries? This is our constant question and prayer intention.

The Church is always being renewed in history as she continues to pass on our living faith to new generations and cultures. This is our moment to "breathe in and breathe out" the Holy Spirit who guides and animates the Church. This always gives us hope and deep peace.

So, therefore, let us "Receive" the Holy Spirit with great openness of heart and "Go" with great hope into this "change of era" world of today.

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**Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn.**

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