



Homily – Mass of the Holy Spirit
Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB

“The earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God’s Spirit hovered over the water.”

These words from the opening of today’s reading from the book of Genesis invite us, as we celebrate this Mass of the Holy Spirit, to remember that the Spirit of God, through whose presence and power the whole of creation was brought into being, is the same Spirit of God to whom we turn now and who calls us to celebrate, rejoice in, cherish and protect the creation, which is God’s first gift to us all.

Equally, too, we are invited to remember that the same Spirit who hovered over creation hovered over the Church, over the first group of the disciples of Jesus, as the Church was brought into being through the mystery of the Lord’s life, passion, death, and resurrection.

We gather here today as members of God’s living Church, ready and anxious to embrace our vocation to be stewards, carers and protectors of God’s wonderful creation, and to do so by embracing our vocation to be members of the Lord’s priestly people, his chosen race, a community called together to sing the praises of God and to be, together, the sacrament of his ongoing presence in the world.

Just as God, in the poetic language of the book of Genesis, found at the end of each day that his creative work was good, so we can be sure that the Lord, who looks upon us now and who encounters us as we celebrate this Eucharist, finds it very good that we have come together.

As we reflect on the beauty of creation, as today’s responsorial psalm invites us to do, and as we thank God for this wonderful gift, we also recognise that through our own actions, the actions of a broken humanity, we have often disfigured this wonderful gift. This week, among the many things we will do, we must turn to God in sorrow and ask for his compassion, forgiveness and healing. And equally, as we reflect on the beauty of the Church, and thank God for the precious gift of our faith, we also recognise that through our own actions or lack of them, the actions and inaction of a broken humanity, we have often disfigured this wonderful gift also. For this, too, we must this week, turn to God in sorrow and ask for his compassion, forgiveness and healing.

This, of course, is exactly what this morning’s gospel invites us to consider. There is an immediacy and an urgency about the encounter between Jesus and the people who “started hurrying all through the countryside, bringing the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was”. The people were anxious to come to Jesus, because they recognised in him someone whom they could approach with hope and with faith: someone who could bring healing, hope and new opportunities. Jesus, for his part, was anxious to encounter them, because he knew, as another gospel passage would express it, that he had come to bring life, and bring life to the full.

We know that as disciples of Jesus we are called, together, to be the living sacrament - the living sign and instrument - of his ongoing presence in the world as our healer, our teacher, our servant and our Shepherd: to be, in other words, a living sacrament of the one who is our Way, and our Truth, and our Life.



Surely, in the end, this is what it means to be a community of disciples. Surely, in the end, this is exactly what Pope Francis is inviting us all to when he speaks as follows:

I dream of a missionary option, that is a missionary impulse, capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures, can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world, rather than for her self-preservation.

This week, we are not being invited to focus our attention primarily on strategies for preserving the Church. Rather we are being invited, among other things, to focus our attention in a particular way on strategies, grounded in the gospels, for preserving the gift of God's creation and, even then, not for its own sake, but so that it can be a worthy, fruitful, and life-enhancing home for all God's people. After all, as the creation story which we have begun to read this morning reminds us, it was only at the end of God's creative work, when God made humanity, and only humanity, in the divine image and likeness, that God found the creation not just good, but very good. We seek to preserve God's creation in all its beauty, splendour and diversity, because it is the home which God has given to us, and it is the home to which God came among us as one of us in the person of Jesus Christ.

One of the precious gifts which the Churches of Oceania have offered to the Universal Church in its synodal journey is the very clear and powerful reminder that the care and stewardship of God's creation is an essential part of the Church's life and mission. In our part of the world, and especially in the island nations of the Pacific, perhaps the Lord is asking us in a particular way to call the whole Church to a deeper realisation that this is an essential part of defending and promoting the dignity of every human person.

In the ministry of Jesus himself, which this morning's gospel invites us to consider, this respect for the dignity of every human person seems to me to be at the heart of every encounter Jesus has with people. If we were to try to describe the pastoral strategy which Jesus adopts it seems to me, at least, that it would be something like this: in every encounter he had, in everything he said and did, in every situation in which he found himself, he reflected, to borrow a phrase from Pope Francis, the face of the Father's mercy. We see this in the immediacy and urgency of his response to the people who crowd around him. We see it in the way he treats each person, according to that person's needs and situation: the woman caught in adultery; Zacchaeus up in his tree; the woman who washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair; Simon Peter, who is given three chances to profess his love and so to heal his three betrayals. As we prepare for the forthcoming Synod and offer our response from Oceania to the continental phase of the Synod, which is the other important task of our gathering here in Suva, it is precisely this call, to be true and credible disciples of the one who is the face of the Father's mercy, which should lie at the heart of our discernment together.

Through this celebration of the Eucharist together may we, like those who gathered together on the first Pentecost morning, have eyes and ears and hearts and minds open to the transforming power of the Spirit, and allow ourselves to be led by that Spirit, to a deeper and more credible life of discipleship of the one who is our Way, and our Truth and our Life.