Pentecost 1,2,3 (Acts 2:1-11; Gal 5:16-25; Jn 20:19-23)

 **MOMENT OF CRISIS**

In the first reading for Pentecost (Acts 2,1-11), the dispirited followers of Jesus faced a frightening moment of crisis. John tells us that "the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews" (Jn 20,19). They had every reason to fear for their lives, after what had happened to Jesus.

The Pentecost happening was frightening. It was tempestuous, sudden, and noisy. Fire descended on them and moved them to quit the safety of their hiding-place, to get out and face an international crowd. The Holy Spirit inspired them to disregard the danger to their lives and to seize the opportunity to address everyone fearlessly, telling them, "You killed Jesus the Nazarene, but God raised him to life" (Acts 2:23).

I have heard that in Chinese and in Japanese writing, the character meaning “crisis” is composed of two characters, one meaning “danger” and the other meaning “opportunity”. Whether the linguistic observation is correct, I find it helpful to think of crisis in that way.

So, crisis has a double meaning: danger and opportunity. The danger that we face tempts us to recoil and retreat. The opportunity is in the invitation to risk surging forward to a new position which may be no less dangerous but is open to positive developments.

In modern society, in the Church, in religious life and in our personal lives, there are alarming signs of danger. We cannot close our eyes to terrorism and violence, also to fundamentalism and aggression, loss of faith, corruption, and decadence. There are also signs of tiredness and break-down, sickness and death - physical, mental, moral, and spiritual. Naturally, we take fright at such signs.

But we must recognize and interpret the signs of crisis in the light of the Holy Spirit. We should not see our crisis as purely negative but take it in its double meaning. Then it doesn’t mean terminal illness or creeping death, but a wake-up call, an occasion for renewal, transition, radical change, and transformation on the road to resurrection.

In the Christian reading of the signs of the times, a crisis is above all a moment of testing, a means of purification, a path to new life, a chance for renewal granted by the creative Spirit of God.

We often hear it said that our times are a time of crisis, but haven't all times been a time of crisis? When has the world been free of a crisis?

Every crisis contains within it a challenge and an opportunity to make a new beginning. Danger and opportunity always present themselves together. If we do not wish to miss the opportunity, what St Paul calls the "time of grace" (Rom 13,11), we must avoid every form of inward-looking individualism that cuts us off in self-gratification and self-satisfaction or in fear of what the future holds for us.

In Australia and in Western Europe, there is a crisis of vocations to the priesthood and to religious life. We are all getting older, and few are joining us. But in other places, in Asia and in Africa, we are being blessed with vocations.

Today's opportunities are realized when we adopt a universal and international outlook.. The Church is wider than Australia and Western Europe. It was exactly the same at Pentecost. The world was wider than a cramped room in Jerusalem.

The first Assembly of the long prepared and delayed Plenary Council will be held in October. That will present a crisis. How are we going to cope with it? But what a tremendous opportunity it will be to rally our resources, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and to reach out to all Australians and to the world.

If we do not close in on ourselves but rather open ourselves to collaborate with others, ready to give and to receive, we will gain new vitality and new perspectives in all aspects of our life - social, political, and religious.

As Catholics, as religious, as individual persons, will we be doomed by a missed opportunity? Or shall we be daring? It all depends on how we respond to the moment of crisis. As St Paul advised the Galatians (Gal 5:16.25), "If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence ... Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit."

Pentecost is a time of mutual understanding in the Church. We are all invited to become ‘Prayer Partners’ with the Members of the Plenary Council and to invoke the Holy Spirit on this critical gathering for the Church in Australia.