

Sermon by the Bishop of Limerick & Killaloe
at the Church of Ireland General Synod Eucharist,
St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, 4th May 2017

The General Synod of the Church of Ireland will take place from Thursday 4th May to Saturday 6th May in Limerick. The Synod Eucharist will take place in St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, at 10.00am on Thursday and the preacher at the service will be The Rt Revd Dr Kenneth Kearon, Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe.

Bishop Kearon will preach from chapter 14 of St John's Gospel and from 1 Corinthians chapter 12 on the theme of mission in the modern world. He will say: 'At its most basic the mission of the Church is to be the Church God wants us to be, and to do the things God wants to have done. Mission will happen when all of the gifts of all of the people of God are put to the task ... So we meet in the middle of the busy city of Limerick ... In the middle of all of this we meet as a church, seeking the mind of God for our Church, praying that our faith will help us make sense of it all, that God will guide and sustain us all, not for the sake of the Synod, but for the sake of the world, to be a church in the world, of the world and for the world.'

Transcript below.

FULL TRANSCRIPT OF THE SERMON

The Gospel is clear – 'The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you.' (John 14)

And so in the spirit of that Gospel we gather from all corners of Ireland to transact the business of the Church of Ireland for another year, just as we've done every year for the last 145 years.

We gather as Synod – not as a conference, though often it will look like a conference, not for a reunion, though there will be many elements of that, nor for a party though if you visit the restaurants and pubs around, over the next few days it will often look like that. A Synod is a purposeful meeting under God, seeking the guidance of the Spirit for his church.

We meet as a church which is both Catholic and Reformed, with a distinctive approach to authority. We are Catholic because we look to the Bible and the early centuries of the church for the basic formularies of our faith in the creeds, and for the shaping of our common life around sacraments and ministry.

We are 'reformed' because we benefit from that exceptional movement in the church in the 16th and 17th centuries which we now call the Reformation, and we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of that Reformation in 1517 this very year. It is from that Reformation that we derive that important insight that the Church is both the Body of Christ and the People of God.

Churches influenced by the Reformation have struggled over the centuries to give expression to that insight. Our Church really only gave formal expression to it in 1871 with the first meeting of this

body – General Synod, with its carefully balanced interrelationships among laity, clergy and bishops.

One of the very welcome changes in our Book of Reports over the years has been the increasing use of the word Mission – you’ll find it on almost every page of each report – even the financial pages of the RB report speaks of its role – ‘to facilitate the mission of the Church of Ireland’ (p14). At its most basic the mission of the Church is to be the Church God wants us to be, and to do the things God wants to have done.

Mission will happen when all of the gifts of all of the people of God are put to the task, just as St Paul outlines in today’s epistle when he speaks of the variety of gifts and the various parts which make up the body of Christ. To quote St Paul, ‘there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone’ (1 Cor 12).

So we meet in the middle of the busy city of Limerick – like every other city in Ireland, outside are the offices, the shops, the apartments, tourists, the suburbs. It’s got its traffic jams, homeless crisis, its migrants and refugees, just like everywhere else; its office parks, industrial estates, 3rd level institutions and schools.

In the middle of all of this we meet as a church, seeking the mind of God for our Church, praying that our faith will help us make sense of it all, that God will guide and sustain us all, not for the sake of the Synod, but for the sake of the world, to be a church in the world, of the world and for the world.

Remember throughout this Synod, that ‘the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.’