

AUCKLAND DIOCESE SYNOD SERMON

7TH SEPTEMBER 2023

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, he was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah”.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **Amen.**

I am deeply humbled to be invited by the Diocesan Bishop, The Right Reverend Ross Bay to preach at this august occasion on the opening of the 57th Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Auckland.

I fully understand the magnitude of integrity and honor that this synodical assembly encompasses and it is an honor to be part of. I do pray that the power of the Holy Spirit Descend from above and anoint each and every member of this synod with God’s Grace and Blessing as you begin your Diocesan synod today.

However, I bring warm greetings from your brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Polynesia, and to assure you all of their good wishes and of course upholding you all of their prayers as you come together to reflect, discern, and listen to one another and to the spirit of God; as you make decisions that would enhance and powerfully transform the ministry of God in the Diocese of Auckland and beyond.

It is my prayer that your Diocesan Synod will become a Pentecostal outburst of the Holy Spirit of God that create spiritual transformation in the lives of our people and become the visible sign of the presence of Jesus Christ in this great City of Auckland and upon this Nation of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The result of your Diocesan synod should also be an outpouring of new oasis of life giving water into our common life and experience of our 3 Tikanga Church.

Co-incidence maybe, but today, is a special day in our Liturgical calendar where we celebrate and remember the **Saints and Martyrs of the Pacific.**

Our Church History recorded the experiences of both good news, successful stories of how the seed of the Gospel was planted in our shores. There were also not so good, painful records of experiences, violent encounters where blood were shed may be just and unjustly, and the story of the CROSS to become victorious. And hence Christianity flourishes in Aotearoa and Oceania.

Yes, there are some issues we are yet to address but the word of Isiah which was read for us tonight; reminded us the intention of God, ***vs 10 “sing to the Lord a new song, sing God’s praise from ends of the earth, from those who go down to the sea and you in the islands, raise your voice and give glory to God and proclaim his praise in the islands”.*** ***Our gathering tonight is to sing in praise of God.***

On that note, we gather here as living legacy of the painful and joyful sacrifices of yesterday. We are sons and daughters of those whose faithfulness to the living God risked their lives in order to plant the Gospel of Christ in this great Island of Aotearoa and in the small islands of the Pacific but importantly in the heart of our people.

Celebrating or remembering the Saints and Martyrs of the Pacific is our own celebration of the sacrifices and commitment of our forefathers and mothers' courage to embrace and become the voice of the disciples amongst our people here in Aotearoa and in the vastness of our Pacific Moana. Today, even in this synodical assembly, we celebrate the call of God to each and everyone here in our time to faithfully engage in God's business and activity."

Some of you have connections and are direct descendants of the early missionaries or leaders who embrace and welcome the bearers of the Gospel. They provide the platform for us to continue to serve Christ faithfully in His Church. Your service to God, and every service we give God is not from our own human response but the spirit of God leads you to know Christ Jesus and we are here because of that operation of the Holy Spirit of God in our Life. It is God's Spirit within us, is our declaration in our liturgy.

What does that makes us? The reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians, that my brother read for us, reminds and assured us that we were born and redeemed by Christ and in his Spirit we were not slaves but become child of God. The ultimate truth is that WE are here as Co heirs with Christ. This Synod is the assembly of faithful devout heirs of the Kingdom dealing with agendas that concern the life of the people of God. God is not of the Diocese of Auckland alone. God is for the whole Church of God.

This reminds me of John Wesley's' bold declaration of his understanding of his engagement in ministry of God; "the whole world is my Parish".

If this is our understanding of the intentions of the Missionaries in taking the Great Commissioning to the ends of the earth, then we have a partnership and a relationship that is yet to be lived out in our time. A new way of re-looking at our engagement in God's Mission and how that new way; enable us to be the Church that God wants us to be. Let's sing a new song together.

It is a song like the song that Simeon sang when he finally saw the Messiah. A new song that bring light in our time of darkness, where we could see Jesus in our struggles and challenges. It is a new song that brings us together to address the impact of Climate Change in the life of our people and its devastating effect economically, socially and psychologically. Can we sing a new song that brings hope to victims of human trafficking, and violence that affect our society? A song that brings hope to those vulnerable in our society, and a song that recognizes our unique diversity but embraces our unity.

I count this a blessing to put before you my longing for a space that I can call home where we will all share as co heirs to those legacy you have that we in Polynesia do not have. How can we in Polynesia offer you what God has gifted us that you rightly should have to contribute to song of praise to God.

Simeon in his song of Praise highlighted to us all God's Love in its fullness. The Gift of His Son for the whole World and for us. In Jesus we see the human face of God, In Jesus, the heart of God is fully revealed. In Jesus we have been redeemed to be Heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

May God Richly Bless this Synod. The Lord be with You.

Archbishop Sione Ulu'ilakepa