

“IT IS THE LORD”



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**Pastoral Message to the Diocese of Plymouth
delivered to the clergy of the diocese on
Friday 6th February and to the delegates
at the ‘Gather’ conference on
Sunday 8th February 2015**



Diocese of Plymouth From the Office of the Bishop

"It is the Lord": Pastoral Message to the Diocese of Plymouth

"Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' The other disciples replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. When it was already light, there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Haven't you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No'. He said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they threw the net out and could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words, 'It is the Lord,' Simon Peter tied his outer garment round him (for he had nothing on) and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net with the fish." (John 21: 1-9)

You know that I have just celebrated my first anniversary in the diocese. It has been an extraordinary year – a wonderful privilege and a great grace, with lots of things to get used to. You may remember that at the ordination last year, I used these words:

"From the age of 17, Jesus has exerted an attraction over my heart; no other can match the magnetic pull of His love, or the peace that His friendship brings. We believe that each person is made for such experience, for each of us is a beloved child of the Father, and called to be with Him forever. We put our belief in Jesus, and our love of Him, at the service of those most in need in our society - the poor, the sick, the vulnerable, those who feel alienated from God."

I believe this is our mission. The Lord invites the disciples to cast their net afresh, despite the long hard night of getting nowhere. He asks us to the same. And if we do not know how to do it, then love will show us the way.

That is what happens in the Gospel – even Peter, who is the rock upon which the Church is built, discovers that is the one who sees with love who recognises the presence of the Risen Lord. This is what we must do – look with love and we will encounter the Lord, and he will direct us where, and how, to cast the net.

In October of last year I was approached by a group of people in the diocese who wanted to try an initiative in one of the Churches of Plymouth. Throughout Europe the initiative is called “Nightfever”. They thought that the name of the initiative might lead to some false assumptions alongside Jesters and the other night clubs on Union Street in Plymouth! So instead they called it simply, “Be still; find peace”. The contours were exactly the same – simply stand on the street and invite people to come into a nearby church and light a candle for somebody. They did this on the three Thursdays before Christmas, when there was late night shopping. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and the crib figures were on the steps of the sanctuary.

I celebrated Mass for the group and spent about an hour and a half quietly praying in the church on one of those evenings. Afterwards, I asked the organising group to send me some reflections on their experience. I would like to share some of those comments with you:

1. Many commented how beautiful it was in the church and how they had felt peaceful there. Oddities included the number of people who thought they would have to pay something.

2. I was quite nervous to approach people on the street inviting them to light a candle (but)I was bowled over by how many people came into the church and how some people were so responsive, even emotional, they seemed to have been waiting just to be invited.

3. An important factor was having Our Lord on the altar. I am so pleased that we were able to do this as it seemed to make it so natural to bring people in to meet and talk to Jesus. Not all of our guests were aware of his presence in this way, but they felt the love and warmth that emanated from the altar and throughout the church and they told us so.

4. It was great seeing the families come in.We had a nativity scene on the sanctuary steps and it was lovely to hear parents explaining to their children the story of the nativity. Those who were not so knowledgeable about the

birth of Jesus were helped by our welcomers..... The parents genuinely seemed pleased to have the opportunity of bringing Jesus into Christmas.

5. Obviously we did not ask people if they were Catholic so we do not know how big this group was but from the way they acted, it was quite sizeable and this group had probably not been inside a church at least not since school assemblies. They reacted like all the others..... hesitant at first maybe but once inside caught up in the atmosphere.

6. We met so many people with such tragic experiences:

- A lady in her 30's who had lost her husband in Afghanistan. This was her 2nd Christmas without him.*
- A lady in her 30's who had had the worst day of her life.*
- A man who had lost his brother at the age of 44 years which was still hurting. He was so pleased to talk about his brother and came into light a candle for him.*
- A man who had just been talking to his mum in Myanmar and was missing her so much at Christmas.*

And my favourite:

7. One man who had a deep effect on me was a middle-aged man coming home from work.....He said at first that he would not come into the Church but talked to me about his previous life growing up a Catholic in the North and how he still remembered it all. He had been in Plymouth nine years and had not been to church since arriving.... he lived next door and had not realised it was a Catholic church. He was just about to leave when he said that he had had a very sad time recently; his friend had been killed in the helicopter crash in a pub in Glasgow and it had been the first anniversary of his friend's death on 30th November. He then came into light a candle for his friend and left clutching the leaflet with the times of masses.

Pope Francis has insisted that the Church should offer people what he calls a "primary proclamation" (in an interview with Fr Spadaro) – the experience of God's merciful love – prior to the rest of Christian teaching. "Prior" in the sense of first and also prior in the sense that the teaching, and our ability to respond to it and live it, depends on this primary proclamation. We must first meet the Lord, and daily encounter Him, if we are to be able to live what He teaches. This is what Pope Francis means by our proclamation taking place "in a missionary key". Only an experience of God's love can prepare the mind and heart for everything else the Church

offers and teaches. The understanding and living of the truths of our faith are, so to speak, the outer manifestation of the inner communion with God the Father in Christ, His only-begotten Son, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We have focused a lot in the Church on, “What is the New Evangelisation and why there is a need for one today”. I have already shared much of that with the Diocese in the talks I gave to the Deanery Clergy after I arrived and then shared more broadly at venues like the Clear Voices festival. What I shared is available on the web, for those who are interested. I know that in many parts of the Diocese there has already been much reflection on this through the lens of *Evangelii Gaudium*. Again, I urge everyone to read, or re-read, that wonderful document.

I think the time has now come for us to more concretely frame how we are to try and put this into practice in our situation. We are all being invited to move from ideas to concrete reality, another of Pope Francis, favoured themes.

Now is the time to recognise that IT IS THE LORD who invites us to cast the net afresh and entrust ourselves to Him. It is the Lord whom we each encounter in our own lives; only a deeper, more faithful, more sustained desire to come close to Him can sustain us in reaching out to others in new ways. It is the Lord to whom we desire others come close; that those who have given up the practice of their faith might be helped to see afresh the joy of encountering him. And It is the Lord whom we offer to those who do not believe. Only He can touch hearts and minds, only He can help reform and renew our society and give our fellow citizens the meaning and hope for which they so long, and which cannot ultimately be delivered by political parties or by agencies of the state.

There are some important elements which initiatives for the New Evangelisation, such as the Nightfever project in Plymouth, highlight for us:

- **Prayer:** What we do needs to be rooted in prayer and most especially a focus on the presence of Jesus – IT IS THE LORD. We seek to bring others to Him.
- **Team:** It is important to be part of a team and not work in isolation – different people have different strengths and gifts. We pray for and support one another.

- **Priest, deacon and people** working together, focused on the same goal, i.e. prayerful outreach to others.
- **Focus:** Our focus is how are we attracting people back to the following of Jesus or how are we providing opportunities and contexts for people to experience him for the first time?
- **Plan:** Each initiative should be carried out in a set time frame, and not use a scatter gun approach
- **Accompaniment:** A process of accompanying people in love is at the heart of our attitude – greeting them, walking with them, giving them space to talk and to share their life, inviting them to take a next step where possible.
- **Joy:** As indicated in *Evangelii Gaudium* - we are not to live "as though we were returning from a funeral.....not like its Good Friday without Easter Sunday.... not as sourpusses"
- **Recognising the place of beauty:** The Church uses the phrase *via pulcritudinis* – the way of beauty. In Catholic theology and understanding beauty is often seen as the 'lost transcendental'. We believe that we come to know God through experiences of what is true, good and beautiful. Perhaps we have concentrated on the first two - on truth and goodness. In this missionary key, we recognise that we do not try to argue people into faith, or badger them about what they are doing right or wrong in their lives. We provide opportunities for them to see or experience the beauty of an encounter with Jesus. The Sacraments, the Church's liturgy, Eucharistic adoration, sacred music, the beauty of the Church building, are all important in discovering this way of beauty. We must never undervalue their importance. Once they have had this experience of the beauty of an encounter with Jesus we can help them discover anew what is true and good.
- **Real experience:** We work with real experience and concrete reality, rather than a theoretical world of ideas or theories, hence, the stress on 'being on the streets' and of 'going out'.
- **Our conversion:** We remember that when we do this, it is our faith and commitment which is deepened by encountering the Lord in those whom we are evangelising and reaching out to.
- **Steps of faith:** We see that this missionary outreach is itself part of our own formation and growth. So, we do not wait till we are more confident, and have got it all sown up. We do not wait till we know the faith inside out.....none of us are there! Our reaching out to others, even with the little faith we feel we have, in itself deepens us in our encounter with the Lord.

• **Resources:** All that we have should be used in service of local evangelisation. This applies to our personal gifts and talents, and also, dare I say, at times it will mean re-positioning our parish and diocesan finances.

In seeking to put the person of Jesus Christ at the heart of all of the Church's pastoral activity, the Holy Father is following closely the teachings of his predecessors in the See of Peter. It was particularly Blessed Pope Paul VI who, in the modern era, urged the Church to remember the need to evangelise and to place Jesus at the centre of this. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* he writes, "There is no true evangelization, if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" (n. 22).

At the close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, St John Paul II reminded the Church: "It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 29).

In the Mass for the inauguration of his ministry as Successor of St. Peter, the Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI summed up the invitation which the Church proposes in every age: "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ — and you will find true life" (Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, 24 April 2005).

In the Diocese of Plymouth therefore we want to focus our lives and our efforts on making it clear that **It is The Lord** who is at the centre of what we are about. So, now, I put before you a simple Mission Statement for the Diocese. I title it simply, IT IS THE LORD:

It is the Lord who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, who came to dwell among us, at once fully human and divine, who was crucified, died and rose from the dead for the salvation of the world. It is Jesus who promised His disciples that he would be with them always. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can know and love Him in and through the community of the Catholic Church.

It is Jesus who is at our side every day to strengthen, to enlighten and to give us freedom. (EG 64). It is the Lord who invites us to see Him and serve Him in the least in our society. It is the Lord who calls us to renew the personal encounter with Him, in the Church, to deepen our love for the truth of the faith, and to joyfully share Him with others. It is the Lord whom we desire to share with others, mindful of those who, for whatever reason, do not know the joy of a daily encounter with Him. We accompany those who have stopped the practise of their Catholic faith, we walk with them, to assist them in coming to see again the beauty of following Jesus.

We recognise that every person is made in the image and likeness of God, and is called to life in Him. In those who do not believe, we recognise that in their openness to truth, to beauty and to goodness, they contain the seeds of the Word who became flesh in Jesus Christ, and It is Him, in every brother and sister, whom we seek to serve. We desire to put ourselves at their service so that they can hopefully, step by step, be led by the Holy Spirit, to experience the joy of knowing Jesus and of being in relationship with Him.

We are each called to be more fully converted to Jesus Christ, and to see more deeply that It is the Lord who helps us to overcome our sinfulness. We are encouraged to be bold in our confidence in Him, to be fully connected to the Church, infused with a sense of urgency, and filled with a deep joy that It is the Lord who wants us to be His “missionary disciples”.

I want now to put forward some concrete suggestions at how we might begin to implement this invitation.

At **Diocesan level** – we are in a process of restructuring what was the Vicariate for Formation into a new Vicariate for the New Evangelisation, Catechesis and Schools. It is to have three pillars:

1. Parishes
2. Youth
3. Schools

Our energy is to be given to Evangelisation in the different areas of the diocese – local parishes and schools; local initiatives taken on with a trust in God, and with great generosity.

What I believe will focus this is a **parish evangelisation team**. So the Diocesan team is there to serve, support, animate what takes place at local

level. To assist the parish in what it can do with those three pillars of outreach to youth, outreach to families and teachers in our schools, and outreach through local initiatives in the parish.

It is worth being reminded of the importance of the parish. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes:

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented. (28)

A sobering question to ask ourselves is, “Would it make any difference if our Church wasn’t there?” We need to focus our efforts reaching out to three groups – those who are practising, to help them see the place of evangelisation in their lives, secondly, those who are non-church going Catholics, i.e. those who for whatever reason have given up practising their faith, and, thirdly, those who do not believe and who are un-churched.

There are some good **National Initiatives** we can draw on. I was appointed Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis in the Bishops Conference last November. I only agreed to take on that task because it dove-tails very much with what I believe we are called to do here in the Diocese. I do not think it is a matter of re-inventing the wheel but of looking around and listening to what has worked in other settings - within the diocese, nationally and internationally. I have seen some things,

nationally, which I believe can help us. I mention two projects.

The first is a Research project about unchurched Catholics, those who rarely or never participate in parish life, who nevertheless, value Catholic education very much and send their children to Catholic schools. There are some things to learn about the 'threshold' place of the school, in terms of it being a place where parents are open to deepening their faith and in those who do not have any faith, in exploring the Catholic faith, for the first time.

So I want some of our initiatives to look at how we can encourage, support and challenge parents to go deeper. We need to engage with our schools as important 'threshold points', offering an important locus for our engagement with those who have stopped the practise of our faith, or those who want to explore a relationship with Jesus for the first time. Our approach and attitude is invitational and sustained.

Within this, we recognise we need more committed Catholic teachers in our schools. We have some really wonderful heads and teachers and I want to support and encourage them in looking at initiatives which will help us 'grow' Catholic teachers. Our schools are hugely diverse. A crucial part of their identity is that they are Catholic by virtue of their provision – that is our vision. While I recognise many people are already doing excellent work in our Catholic schools, there is a need to have initiatives and structures in place to foster growth and confidence in Catholic identity and practice. In this way we can support committed Catholic teachers to give focus and energy to the Catholic mission of the school. In our Diocesan Evangelisation initiatives we must try and look at pathways which will help us train and form good Catholic teachers. In this respect I believe that CAST, our Multi-Academy Trust of schools, provides a really good opportunity of doing something diocesan-wide.

The second National initiative happens this year and is titled "PROCLAIM 15". This is a gathering in July in Birmingham, which will have a focus on encouraging and resourcing Evangelisation teams working at diocesan and local level. I am asking 35 from the Diocese to be present at it. The focus will be to look at what is happening in service of proclaiming the faith across England and Wales and to share that. It will help us to discern how to continue to make the journey from vision to practice, to identify effective concrete initiatives carried out in local parishes and communities. There are already some great resources on the Bishop's Conference website if you want to access them about PROCLAIM.

Our focus must be **local projects**. There are some really good resources and initiatives coming out. I have already shared with the parishes a little book titled, "Welcome to witness; becoming an evangelising parish". The practical, concrete proposals come in Chapter 4 onwards. One of the first things it recommends is a parish audit – not of buildings or property, not of the financial situation, but to look at what we do well, what we might do better, in respect of 'outreach' to others. I believe it is a matter of sharing the good news, and a willingness to take risks in casting the net afresh.

I would like to mention some initiatives that I have seen in the past year; some are in the diocese and some are from further afield. The list is not exhaustive:

- **Nightfever:** I have already mentioned Nightfever, ie opening a Church for people to come in and light a candle. It works well in areas where the Church is on the street and there is reasonable 'footfall'. That was adapted in the parish of Marnull at Gillingham, in a more rural setting, to be an 'open Church' afternoon, to invite local villagers into the parish church during the day. The most common response was not, "I'm not interested", but "Are we allowed in?" Or there was "come and see a variety of cribs" in the parish of Kingsbridge – on a Saturday before Christmas - over 300 people came through the doors.
- **School of discipleship:** There are many resources which help in deepening our encounter with Jesus, and we must help people grow faith once they have begun to make this journey. Some of these are- CAFÉ, Catholic ALPHA, "Called and Gifted" Programme, Robert Barron's "Catholicism" and "New Evangelisation" series, "the Amazing Parish" - which has a great set of resources available on the Web, and "Sycamore" – a new initiative being developed by Fr Stephen Wang and a team from the University of London. All of these aim at assisting with the 'personal journey' of conversion that we have to undergo. They can be a particularly helpful once you have got a group of interested individuals who want to explore faith further. There are lots of other good resources available which help parishes reflect and organise their efforts, and also provide resources for different groups, at different levels.
- **Teams:** A number of parishes in the Diocese are already developing evangelisation teams, and introducing local initiatives – in the local college of higher education, in the market square, and using initiatives such as "Come Home for Christmas", or "Bring a friend" to Church Sunday, door-to-door house visiting inviting people into conversation about faith and providing opportunities for them to engage with the Church community. I want to stress the importance of a parish evangelisation team working

with the priest, and taking the risk to try different things.

- **New Movements:** There is the freshness of the New Movements/ Ecclesial Realities in the Diocese, and we need to be open to the richness they bring in the life of diocese? I would like to see more being encourage here. One example of a movement who have come in the past year is Chemin Neuf. They offer invitations at Shlerder Abbey to individuals to do an Ignatian retreat, or to Families to go on a Cana weekend.
- **Celebrate:** I would also like to mention Celebrate and the events they organise. I have seen, and been very impressed, by the accompaniment, practical assistance given to families, to married couples, and to a peer ministry with young people. There is also a sense of joy and enthusiasm in the faith. We have much to learn from such initiatives, not least that when we organise things we provide opportunities for families to be able to take part.
- **Crossing the Threshold:** an initiative of the bishops, which aims to inspire and encourage the starting of parish evangelisation teams with a focus on outreach to non-Churchgoing Catholics. There are some good resources and expertise available; we need not labour in isolation.
- **Prayer:** There is also the impetus for a more focused contemplative life and presence at Lanherne with the Franciscan Sisters who are there, and we give thanks for the Poor Clare's at Lynton, too. We need such deep sources of prayer in the diocese if we are to sustain our outreach. Some people in the parish, especially the elderly or housebound, make an invaluable contribution to our efforts through their prayer and intercession. Every initiative should be accompanied by a team of pray-ers, and be sustained by a pattern of 'going out' and 'return' to the Lord in the cycle of intercession and prayerful gratitude which is part of the spiritual life.
- **The School of the Annunciation at Buckfast Abbey:** There are various courses there which are particularly helpful and a great resource for us here in the south-west. I particularly encourage those wanting to take the intellectual journey more seriously, to look at what is available there. There are some wonderful courses on offer. I draw your attention to two of them - an excellent Foundation Course for Catechists which starts at the end of February. Secondly, a distance learning diploma on "The Media and the New Evangelisation". This has caught the attention and imagination of the Social Communications Office of the Holy See and is on the front page of their website. The School's engagement with culture and the exploration of the place of beauty in that, is fresh and original. I know that we can continue to draw on the riches that are there. Given the distance-learning opportunities, all parts of the diocese, and many from further afield, can participate.

- **Beauty:** I spoke earlier about the *via pulchritudinis*, the path/ way of beauty. We have much that is 'beautiful' in our church, in our faith – we must simply invite people to experience it and make the journey into it.
- **Processions and pilgrimage:** These provide such rich opportunities to give expression to the popular piety of people, especially of the accompaniment of Our Lady in discovering her Son. We must also seize the opportunity of World Youth Day happening in Europe next year, in Krakow. Such experiences can be life-changing and transformative for our young people.
- **Ecumenism:** I have listened carefully to the experience and practical approach of the Evangelical churches. For me, it is one of the more exciting and interesting dimensions of Ecumenism. What have we to learn from them in their experience of “growing” or “seeding” a church”? Just some simple initiatives that I have seen - taking the traditional parish Mothers and Toddlers Group and giving the women who attend a 'pampering day' at a local Spa. Having the space to relax and reflect led three mothers to join a local church's CAFE course; A “loving the neighbourhood’ afternoon where members of a church community spent time on the street giving out cups of tea/coffee, painting the local railings of a housing estate, beautifying the grounds surrounding the church by clearing the rubbish and putting some plants out. One mother, who could never get her teenage children to tidy their rooms, spoke of how engaged they were in this concrete, practical outreach, how they came home at the end of that Saturday, saying, "Can we do it again next week?" And two of my favourites which sound a bit strange and even gimmicky – “A Clothes swapping evening” in a local pub for women! Women were asked to bring a bag of clothes they no longer used- 50 of them met in a pub one evening; they went home with a new outfit, but also with some new friends. Out of it, five of them joined the local ALPHA group in the parish. The other initiative is called “Who let the Dad’s out?” - fathers taking their young children to the local parish centre on a Saturday morning. The children were able to play together, whilst dads got a cooked breakfast and were able to read the Saturday sports pages; mums got a morning to themselves. From these human contexts, the local Church is seen as being engaged in missionary outreach to the local community. I have given some examples with particular responses and outcomes, but who knows what seeds are sown and where they might bear fruit? Cast the net wide and who knows where it may fall.
- **Vocations** – it has been a joy to ordain one priest and two deacons for the diocese this past year. I look forward to the two priestly ordinations in the summer. We have three others in formation and three others discerning. We must continue to accompany our young – and not so young – and

present to them the possibility of a life lived in a particular way in the Church. Within those particular calls we must continue to hold out the beauty of following the Lord in the priesthood or religious life.

There are so many other initiatives and much that we can share with one another in terms of what's worth trying. Whilst we can pick and choose different programmes, or initiatives, depending on the circumstances of the parish, school or local community, what we cannot do is say that there is an option about the focus on evangelisation. Pope Francis makes that clear. But it is an imperative from the Lord Himself – It is The Lord who's says, "Cast out your nets for a catch".

I would like to summarise some elements which I believe are vital as we move forward on this journey together.

To love Jesus Christ and to seek to encounter him in prayer: Our proclamation is focused on Jesus, his gospel and his way. Our lives are defined by our encounters with Jesus. We cannot give what we have not first received and this encounter with Him is something which occurs not just once in our history but is something which is renewed daily in the personal experience of prayer and conversion. Some concrete ways we will frame this in these next few months.

PRAYER: I am asking that prayer be at all stages of what we do. Specifically, I ask for periods of prayer in the Diocese throughout Lent and Easter-tide as we embark together. We have prepared a series of leaflets for Eucharistic Holy Hours which have been sent to the parish. I would also encourage the praying of the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary in Lent, and the Glorious Mysteries in Eastertide, if you do not already pray the rosary.

VIGILS: The Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation has suggested a Vigil of Prayer throughout the church in March; you will be sent information about it. PROCLAIM 15 – which happens on 11 July – have asked Diocese' to have a Vigil that weekend so that local communities can participate in what is taking place nationally.

RELICS OF BLESSED LOUIS AND ZELIE MARTIN: Shortly after I came, I wrote to Lisieux to invite the relics of Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin, the parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus of the Holy Face, to visit the Diocese. They are the first parents of a saint to be beatified, and the the first spouses in the history of the Church to be proposed for sainthood

together.

Zélie and Louis are an inspiration to the families of today. Each owned a small business and worked hard while raising a large family. In the 19th century this two-career couple faced the challenges we face in the 21st: finding good child care; achieving professional excellence; operating a profitable business; caring for aging parents; educating a special-needs child; forming their children in the faith; finding time to pray and to be active in their parish.

Devout Catholics, they saw Christ in the poor and worked for a just society. In 1877 Zélie died of breast cancer, leaving Louis a single parent with five minor daughters to bring up. Later Louis was diagnosed with a form of dementia (cerebral arteriosclerosis) and spent three years in a psychiatric hospital.

Like us, Louis and Zélie could not control their circumstances. Life came at them unexpectedly, just as it comes at us. They could not prevent their tragedies: the Franco-Prussian war, when they had to house nine German soldiers; the infant deaths of four of their nine children, one from abuse by a wet-nurse; their painful diseases; Zélie's premature death. Nor could they escape their responsibilities as business owners, caregivers, spouses, and parents. Their genius lay in how they accepted what happened to them: they accepted their own powerlessness, that God might be all-powerful in their lives.

They taught the same radical openness to their youngest daughter, Thérèse, now a doctor of the Church. Zélie and Louis were not declared "blessed" because of Thérèse. She became a saint because of them. They created an environment that invited her to holiness, and she responded freely to the invitation they offered her. They offer the same invitation to us and in this period between the two Synods in Rome, they are particularly important and welcome guests in our diocese. We look forward to welcoming them in Plymouth, at the Cathedral, between the 15th and 18th May, and in Dorchester between the 18th and 20th May.

- **THE SACRAMENTS:** Do not believe that the sacraments cannot be opportunities for this outreach. I have already mentioned Eucharistic adoration, but I would also like us to encourage, and re-discover for ourselves, the important place of Penance, of Confession. We should think seriously, as a diocese, about the initiative, "The Light is on For You", ie a diocesan-wide opportunity for individuals to go to confession in any of the

parish churches of the diocese, in agreed hours, a set night of the week, maybe during Lent or Advent. I know the situation in this diocese is different to that of a metropolitan city diocese, but I think it could still work in our context with its scattered communities and multiple Church parishes. Why could we not simply use the one 'parish Church' for such occasions, as we do, for example, when we celebrate the Easter Vigil? The key thing is to creatively give people the opportunities they need to find silence and peace, and most especially to experience God's mercy.

OPEN DOORS: I believe our Church buildings, in particular, have a vital role in this. We need to take the risk to leave them open – open wide the doors. Can the parish Church itself be indeed “a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey”, to use that lovely phrase from *Evangelii Gaudium*?

I believe people are looking for this from us, too. If we are going to say anything of meaning to our contemporary world then we need to do so out of a strong stance of knowing what it is to be silent, and especially silent before the Mystery and mercy of God. We need to build the inner person because the only way in which we are going to be able to be courageous and have the strength needed to go outside of ourselves is if we have a strong sense of who we are and who God is to us within our own life and history.

We need to be courageous. We live in a time when Europe has in many ways become tired of its Christian roots.

Yet we are so fortunate to have within our particular history the example and witness of one of the greatest evangelisers the Church has ever known. **St Boniface**, our Diocesan Patron, should in many ways be the Patron Saint of our Evangelisation efforts. He encouraged the encounter between Christian culture and the local cultures in which he lived, even if they seemed at first to be far from the Gospel. Indeed, he knew that humanizing and evangelizing culture was an integral part of his mission. For example, he composed a treatise on the *Ars grammatica* in which he explained the declinations, verbs and syntax of the Latin language. But this was for him not some heady exercise, but a means of reaching more people, of providing education so that all encountered a deeply Christian spirit and sensibility which helped them live in a more human way. In passing on the ancient Tradition of Christian values, he grafted on to the Germanic populations a new, more human life. As a true son of St Benedict, he was able to combine prayer and work, the pen and the plough.

We must ask ourselves what would be the Ars grammatica of our day? I do not have any easy answers to that question. But surely part of it must be an engagement with the world of information technology and the internet highway. For all of its problems and challenges we must use it as a vehicle to continue to engage with the culture, especially of our young people.

Our young people especially need to be helped to develop fully in their own humanity and in their appreciation and love of Christ and His Church, and we must use the tools and methods which they inhabit and which can reach them. It is also salutary to recall that St Boniface remained a missionary in his late 70's, so nobody is too old for this!

St Boniface's courageous witness is an invitation to us all to welcome God's word into our lives, to love the Church passionately, to feel a common responsibility for her future, to seek her unity around the Successor of Peter. At the same time, he reminds us that Christianity, by encouraging the dissemination of culture, furthers human progress. It is now up to us to respond to such a wonderful heritage and to make our witness fruitful for the benefit of this generation and those to come.

I believe there is a tremendous opportunity in this diocese. I looked recently at some statistics recently of the percentage of the population in the different diocese' that are Catholic. The national average across the country is 8-10% of the population. Yet there are enormous variations – in the Diocese of Liverpool Catholics are about 45%; we are between 3 and 4% in this Diocese. Now you could look at that figure and say, “Oh what an uphill climb we've got”, or you could look at it and say, “If we get to the National average then there will be double the numbers”.

We are to love the Church and to concentrate positively on her teaching:

I think it is worth remembering Yves Congar's, distinction between true and false reform, captured in a text of that name, from 1950. He looked back over Church history and noted two aspects in respect of those who sought to renew the Church and her expressions of faith. Reformers started with good intentions – to counteract abuses and corruption, restore holiness and zeal. But some spun off into schism and division, while others produced great fruits in renewed holiness and unity. What was the difference? Congar found that true reform was always rooted in pastoral concern for ordinary faithful people. What Pope Francis calls,

'God's holy". True reform was oriented to, and shaped by, the peripheries, not the centre, another of Pope Francis' favoured themes. It valued tradition – the Catholic constants such as Eucharistic worship, a teaching Magisterium, devotion to Our Lady and the saints, and so on. These were valued by the ordinary faithful rather than by closed-in groups or elites. True reform sought to make the Church more true to itself and was on the guard against attempts to align it with the contemporary secular movements

The fruits of true reform were a greater zeal and fidelity, as well as unity. It helped people see anew the beauty of Catholic faith, and to enter into it. Part of this journey of the New Evangelisation, because it is a journey of greater renewal and reform, must inevitably involve a certain caution about false reform. False reform rejects links and tradition, and is vulnerable to or aligned with contemporary ideologies, producing reactions that end in division and sometimes schism. With false reform, the Church becomes a battleground of competing elite projects and what follows in disunity and the loss of identity. So let's just be aware of this. Let us not allow ourselves to be drawn into factionalism, whether of the left or the right. Let us remember "It is the Lord" whom we serve and it is to Him, and not to ourselves, or our little group, that we desire to bring others. We focus on the 'settled' theology of the Church; we labour in "the field hospital" not in the University laboratory.

The wonderful gift of the Catholic communion is that the revelation has unfolded over time. There are such rich resources there. From the earliest apostolic times, through the fathers, through Gregory and Leo and Ambrose and Augustine and Benedict and Bernard and Ignatius and Francis and Dominic and Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross and dear little Therese and Francis Xavier, Francis de Sales. In some of our own life times we have the insight of people like von Balthazar, de Lubac and Congar and the richness of the papal teachings of Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict and Francis. We are invited to be familiar and at home with this wonderfully rich tradition that is ours.

We have a tradition of witnesses who have themselves encountered Jesus Christ and who are able to reflect on that experience and make it available to the people of their time. Part of our task is to be able to offer to people the richness and the fullness of Catholic life, and of course there is a wonderful diversity. That's the beauty and the blessing of the saints, and the charisms within the Church. We encounter Jesus and are called to witness to Him in so many different ways; for some this will

predominately be in the rosary and in pilgrimages, for some in prayer groups, some in the work for the poor and marginalised, some in scripture study or lectio, some through the new movements and newer ecclesial communities.

When we are in touch with the co-witnesses of our tradition and of our Church, we too are given the inspiration and the confidence to witness to the people of our own time. Our witness will be one of authority and integrity. It will be a fruit of a lived experience which resonates not only because it has the weight of the tradition, but also has the sense of being completely contemporary for the people of our day.

In his recent trip to the Philippines, Pope Francis' invitation to us was echoed in the words of farewell to him spoken by Cardinal Tagle at the final Mass in front of an estimated seven million people. The Cardinal said that the Filipinos want to follow Francis "to the peripheries — to the shanties, to prison cells, to hospitals, to the world of politics, finance, art, sciences, culture, education, and social communications."

I challenge myself and you to "go out" in this way. And let us never, never, forget that the Lord accompanies us. When we doubt, when we are challenged, when we are asked, "why do you do this...." Let our answer be, "It is the Lord....It is the Lord."



+Mark O'Toole

Bishop of Plymouth