**Homily for World Mission Sunday, Plymouth Cathedral**

**20th October, 2019**

During the summer I spent some time on a pastoral visit to Nigeria. I was visiting the Diocese of Orlu in the Eastern part, in Igbo-land, because we have three priests from that part ministering here in the Diocese of Plymouth. The local Bishop invited me to come and ordain their new cohort of priests for this year. So I had the great privilege of ordaining 14 new priests.

Whilst there, I was often struck by the vibrancy of the Church in Africa. At every mass the people sing an anthem to the Gospel:

*“Praise to the Gospel for it brought us education,
praise to the gospel for it showed us that girls could be educated,
praise to the Gospel for it taught us to accept twins,
praise to the Gospel for it taught us to recognise the dignity of every human being, and so on....”*

That line about twins struck me, but of course before Christianity, in that part of Africa, twins were put to death. It was the arrival of the Gospel that brought life.

Those who preached the Gospel had a profound impact because they stayed with the people, they learnt their languages and their culture. They taught and witnessed to the humanising nature of the Gospel. The Gospel makes us better human beings. The Gospel, our Faith, helps us to stick up for the poor, for the weak and the vulnerable.

This is what we celebrate on this Mission Sunday. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has called for this month to be recognised as a Month of Mission. It is a time for us to recognise that at the heart of mission is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. For this we need perseverance. The kind of perseverance that the Lord speaks of in the Gospel. Always seeking Jesus and wanting to come close to Him.

It is also a moment to remember that each of us is called to participate in the mission of the Church. As St Paul reminds us in that second letter to Timothy, “Proclaim the message, and welcome or unwelcome, insist on it.” “(2 Timoty 3). Today we especially give thanks to God for *Missio,* the Holy Father’s own Charity which works alongside local missionaries in some of the poorest parts of our world, to ensure that all peoples have the opportunity of an encounter with Jesus Christ. Many of you, I know, support *Missio* through the Red Box appeals. *Missio* proclaims Christ in over a thousand mission dioceses in 157 countries. It supports the training of 30,000 future priests and 11,000 religious sisters.

The children’s arm of the charity is called *“Mission Together”,* supporting both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of children throughout the world. Its unique motto, “children helping children” is at the heart of the belief that children are called to mission, too. They have a key part to play in bringing hope to others. This is why I am delighted that some children from our local Catholic schools are here in the Cathedral this morning – from Holy Cross, St Joseph’s and the Cathedral School. Thank you for all that you are doing to remind us all of our part in Jesus’ mission.

I am happy, too, that Christopher Bleasdale, our Diocesan Director for the *Missio* Red Boxes, and Tony Armstrong, our Director for *Mission Together* are here today. They will be at the back of the Cathedral at the end of Mass, if you want to know more about this important work. I thank them, and all who work with them in this important outreach.

Let us each, in our own way, reflect on how we can support the Church’s work for mission. Let us each remember to “Proclaim the message, and welcome or unwelcome, insist on it.”

+Mark O’Toole

Bishop of Plymouth