



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

**"How to be a disciple making disciple -
Prayer, Faith, Loving Service and the Sacramental life"**

(Lecture given to the Guild of Our Lady and St Joseph, at St Patrick's, Soho Square, 2nd Oct 2017).

I am very grateful for this invitation to speak and to the Guild of Our Lady and St Joseph for organising this and for the support that they give to the School of the Annunciation at Buckfast Abbey. You will know that the School has an international reach but as the local bishop I want to say what a great blessing it is to our diocese. Theological reflection and expertise within the Catholic tradition, is a limited resource in the South West, and indeed more widely in the English speaking world. It is good for us to have the School among us. You will know that I am here to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The text of the Catechism was finally accepted on 25th June 1992, after six years of drafting, and it was promulgated four months later, on the 11th October. I am delighted that we have this opportunity to mark this significant anniversary.

Initially, the Catechism was misinterpreted by some as an imposition by the Church of a set of factual rules, telling people what they should or should not do. Such a parody, was the approach taken in some of the secular media, and unfortunately by some Catholic writers, too. As we have inhabited it and worked with it these last decades we have come to see what a wonderful gift it is to us. It enables us to enter more fully into the extraordinary milieu of the Church's faith and life.

In the opening chapter of Charles Dickens classic novel, *Hard Times*, we hear the following words from Mr Gradgrind,

"Now what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring

up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to the Facts, Sir!”

Dickens goes on to contrast the dull and dreary philosophy of Gradgrind's Coketown School with the magic, vitality and exuberance of Mr Sleary's circus. Perhaps the saddest sentence in the whole novel is the comment made by Gradgrind to his young daughter during the opening pages – “Louisa never wonder” he says to her. How poignant when Louisa squeezes through a loophole in the circus tent – truly to be seen as a “loophole” in her father's impoverished view of the world – and there discovers in contrast to her father's philosophy that all is wonderful and beautiful.

As we mark this 25th Anniversary of the Catechism I want us to do so from this perspective of seeing it as an invitation to each of us to Always Wonder! To see the sheer beauty and wonder of our faith. The Church is not a place of superstitious magic, but the context in which to find true life, life that liberates and reaches beyond the bonds of individual personality. It is in the tent of the Church, within the arc of her faith, that we discover a “loophole” into another world, to reach out to, and point the way towards the ground of all being, God Himself, revealed to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

How I recall the excitement of going through sections of the original French text as I prepared some simple talks in our parish in North West London in the autumn of 1992. The working language for the committee was French, and Bishop David Konstant, the Bishop of Leeds at that time, was on the drafting committee. He had given a copy of the index and summaries to Cardinal Hume, and the Cardinal had kindly shared them with me. I was doing some work with him on his personal library, and he and I used them as he put together some courses for those Anglican Clergy who were contemplating a move into the Catholic Church at that time.

I have always loved the Catechism's clarity, its structure – particularly the four pillars - and its accessibility. I studied theology as an undergraduate in the 1980's, a time of exploration and creativity in theology, it is true, but also a time of confusion and conflict. Almost everything in faith seemed 'up for grabs'. There was the dictum about a particular Theology Faculty - not in this country - where it was said that when asked what Transubstantiation might mean, the response given was, “ At this university it means that everything and everyone changes at Mass, apart from the bread and wine!”

It is always worth remembering that this was part of the impoverished intellectual milieu against which the Catechism emerged. In many ways, this

was what it was seeking to counter. In this respect, I have found the comments made by Cardinal Ratzinger, on the tenth anniversary of the Catechism's promulgation in 2002, particularly helpful. I quote;

"The Catechism is not a theology book, but a book of the faith, for the teaching of the faith. In present day theological consciousness this fundamental difference is often not sufficiently present. Theology does not invent with its method intellectual reflections that one can believe or not - in such a case the Christian faith would be entirely a product of our own thought and no different from the philosophy of religion. Theology, if rightly understood, is rather the effort to recognize the gift of knowledge that precedes the reflection. On this point, the Catechism cites the noted saying of St Augustine that classically synthesizes the essence of the theological endeavour: "I believe in order to understand and I understand the better to believe" (158; Sermo 43, 7, 9). The relation between the given, which God offers to us in the faith of the Church, and our effort to appropriate this given in rational understanding, is a fundamental part of theology. The goal of the Catechism is precisely that of presenting this given that precedes us, whose developing doctrinal formulation of the faith is offered in the Church; it is a proclamation of faith, not a theology, even if a reflection seeking understanding is a natural part of an appropriate presentation of the teaching of the Church's faith and in this sense faith is opened to understanding and to theology." (Address of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'Current Doctrinal Relevance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church', CDF, 9th October, 2002).

It is this sense of the given-ness of faith which is so very important to hold on to in a world which is fragmented and confused, and to do so without falling into the trap of reducing faith to a set of factual propositions - "Stick to the facts, Sir!"

The fundamentals of our faith - Incarnation, Redemption, our Sanctification in Christ - these are the given of Revelation. We do not make them up according to our own lights. In this sense, the Catechism moves our understanding of Reason beyond a Grandgrind-esque interpretation of the Facts. The proper use of Reason becomes a window which opens up for us a whole other horizon. Faith is recognised and experienced as a form of knowledge which leads us to the exercise of authentic freedom in the service of our brothers and sisters.

It is important to remember that this is very strong in Pope Francis, also. He comes to it, and summarises it, not in the same way as Cardinal Ratzinger/

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Pope Francis uses existential, pastoral categories, but he is no less clear about the fundamental reality that the Church exists to point not to itself but to another, the Other who is God, who in Jesus Christ has shown Himself. Believing in Him, coming into personal relationship with him, encountering Him, is the heart of our discipleship. And it is within this wonderful tent of the Church we experience the beauty, the wonder and glory of the Lord, who comes close to each of us, and enables each of us to follow Him.

You will know the experience of Pope Francis's youth. He described it at the Pentecost Vigil of meeting with Ecclesial movements in 2013:

"One day in particular, though, was very important to me: 21 September 1953. I was almost 17. It was "Students' Day", for us the first day of spring — for you the first day of autumn. Before going to the celebration I passed through the parish I normally attended, I found a priest that I did not know and I felt the need to go to confession. For me this was an experience of encounter: I found that someone was waiting for me. Yet I do not know what happened, I can't remember, I do not know why that particular priest was there whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess, but the truth is that someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice, or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest."

In that meeting, Pope Francis goes on to speak about what this means for each one of us:

"This experience of faith is important. We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first! In Spanish we have a word that explains this well: *primerear* — the Lord always gets there before us, he gets there first, he is waiting for us! To find someone waiting for you is truly a great grace. You go to him as a sinner, but he is waiting to forgive you.The Lord is waiting for us. Moreover, when we seek him, we discover that he is waiting to welcome us, to offer us his love. And this fills your heart with such wonder that you can hardly believe it, and this is how your faith grows — through encounter with a Person, through encounter with the Lord. Some people will say, "No, I prefer to read about faith in books!" It is important to read about faith, but look, on its own this is not enough! What is important is our encounter with Jesus, our encounter with Him, and this is what gives you faith because He is the one who gives it to you!"

I believe, this is why Pope Francis stresses 'Primary proclamation' in his teaching, as he annually did in the letter he wrote to Catechists, whilst Archbishop of Buenos Aires, every 21 August, the Feast of St Pius X, who had produced a Catechism in 1908. Jesus Christ is proclaimed to us, received by us, and we in turn must proclaim Him, offer Him, to others. This is what it means to be a disciple making disciple. Faith is always deeply personal but it is never private. We must come back to this truth again and again, and it is this which brings Evangelisation and Catechesis together.

It is at the heart of his text *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he states so very clearly: "On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment. For this reason too, "the priest – like every other member of the Church – ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized". (Paragraph 63)

You will know the fourfold structure of the Catechism; section 1 - what we believe- faith; , section 2 - how we practise what we believe - the sacraments and Liturgy; section 3 - Life in Christ - how we live what we believe - the commandments and the moral life; section 4 - Prayer.

I believe that these are at the heart of our Evangelisation too, even if I put them in a slightly different order. In doing so I take my lead from the reflection given on the New Evangelisation by Cardinal Ratzinger, where he stresses the place of prayer as the initial disposition and method in the new Evangelisation. ("New Evangelisation: Building the Civilisation of Love - Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers", for Jubilee of Catechists, 12th December, 2000.)

To be a disciple making disciple, you need prayer, faith formation, loving service and the Sacramental life. I think these four are distinct but united, a little like the Trinity! And there can be a perichoresis of them, too. You will know that term was coined by the Cappadocian Fathers - St Gregory Nazianzen, St Basil of Caesarea, and St Gregory of Nyssa - as a way of trying to talk about the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity, their

dancing together. When you reflect on one you quickly entertain the other two.

And the pillars of the catechism are a little like that. When you reflect on one you know you have to include the others, too. But I do not think you have to be too rigid about where you start. I hope you find that when engaging in any catechesis or evangelisation initiatives. Each meeting, each session of Catechesis should contain the four elements, but sometimes you start with prayer, at other times with a discussion on a moral issue, at other times with reflection on a sacrament, and at other times with some exposition of a particular aspect of the faith.

Dr Petroc Wiley who has helpfully spoken of “Faith Prayed, Faith professed, faith lived and faith celebrated” to highlight the elements. (“The Catechism and the New Evangelisation; Lesson Planning” in *The Catechetical Review*, Issue #2.1). I think that helps bring out both their distinctiveness and their interrelationship. So my order for tonight is - Prayer, Faith Formation, Loving Service and Sacramental Life/ Liturgy. For me, that is also a bit cyclical as I believe the sacraments take us back into prayer, and our relationship with God.

1. Prayer

We are not communicating a message but a person. Jesus Christ is the centre of our catechesis, our evangelisation. We cannot give what we have not received. Encounter with Jesus is central. We must remember that prayer is not something to be done at the beginning and left behind, as we sometimes do at meetings. The Catechism has Prayer as the fourth section and it should be argued that it is the culmination, rather than an epilogue.

We must have sustained prayer, for each initiative in the parish. I remember hearing about a group in the diocese who were running a day for young people, and they had a period of Eucharistic adoration and went and sat in the chairs for a half hour before the young people arrived, in order to pray for the ones who were going to sit in those chairs, that they may encounter Jesus.

It is important to remember that all of us are called to deepen our encounter with Jesus, and to draw close to Him in prayer. There is the importance of increasing prayer opportunities in our parishes, especially the devotional life; rosary, pilgrimages, intercessory prayer, times of Eucharistic Adoration.

Prayer offered by the sick and housebound is particularly efficacious. There is the need to encourage and model prayer in the home, in families and from children who un-self-consciously articulate their love for Jesus and Mary when encouraged to do so. Children can teach us so much about what it means to trust in Jesus. Yesterday, even though it was a Sunday we recall St Therese, the great artist of the Little Way and of spiritual childhood. In prayer, all of us are beggars, infants crawling our way to the Lord.

Of course, the fundamental thing about our prayer is that we recognise this is ultimately not our work, but God's. We recognise the given-ness of our faith. He is there before us: what Pope Francis says – primerear...waiting for us. Do we really believe it? Do we live as though we believe Jesus is with us, as He promised He would be, or do we live as practical atheists? In this respect, cynicism can be a particular fault that priests and Bishops can suffer from. It is a manifestation of a practical form of atheism. We must ask the Holy Spirit to rid us of it daily.

2. Formation in Faith

Historically, Catholics belonged to a variety of sodalities and groups. In each there was a sharing and a formation in faith. Nowadays, life is more fragmented and disparate. People are at different levels and at different points on the journey. Many experience a kind of silent struggle and sit with some fundamental questions:

“Does life really have any meaning? How do I bring science and religion together? Surely it is science that gives us the Truth, whereas faith, is it not just private opinion? You believe what you want and I believe what I want; it doesn't really matter, does it? What happens after death? Why do such good people suffer? Surely a good God would not allow this? Are human beings worth anything? Am I?”

These are some of the questions that many in our society ask, often implicitly. We know it is only ultimately in Jesus that each of these questions finds its proper place.

So we need to provide contexts where people can properly explore the questions that are at the heart of being human, and where they can receive accompaniment and guidance from the richness of the Church's tradition. The Catechism is such a very rich resource here. I would hope that some of the initiatives offered in our Diocese' and parishes, will give opportunities to

grow in confidence in sharing our faith with others, as we all grapple with these questions, and find our meaning in Jesus Christ.

In the three and half years I have been Bishop of Plymouth, it has been good to experience something of the faith of good people giving so generously of their time in so many Catechetical programmes – First Communion, Confirmation, RCIA, Baptism and Marriage. So many people work so hard, and so faithfully, to ‘pass on’ the faith in these contexts. A key reflection I ask of our parishes, is ‘what do we commit in the parish’s resources to assist people, and to help form them, so that they have confidence in what they are doing, and are using the best possible methods and resources?’

We all know that we learn step by step, and that learning is life-long. What do we offer, in our parishes and Diocese’ that will assist people at different levels and stages, so that their journey of discipleship is also deepening and expanding?

The Church’s vision is that every moment of teaching, of catechesis, is also a moment of evangelisation. I believe that we have not taken this to heart in this country. We catechise, but do we really evangelise? Do our people leave our catechetical programmes with a sense of having been called by Jesus, that they have encountered Him? He wants them to know how very close to them He actually is. We form people and send them forth in the faith but do they really have a sense of Jesus’ personal call? As disciples, if we have not really had a sense that we are called by Jesus, that He desires us personally, then being formed and sent forth is like building on sand.

In Catholic education, too, we must preserve the link between faith and academic achievement. Our vision in education has always been to combine the search for excellence with the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ, who reaches out to the most disadvantaged and poor. The pressure coming from the Government, and from Education authorities, as well as from some of our own good Catholic people, is to accept that, because they are so difficult to find, the Catholic leadership requirement in schools and academies should be dropped. We need to ensure the intimate connection between solid academic and professional excellence, and a clear and strong Catholic identity which keeps the person of Jesus at the heart of what we do. In our understanding, a Catholic Head or CEO of a Multi-Academy Trust is vital in this. Our children and families, as well as our contribution to the common good, deserves nothing less.

Celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation and meeting our young people through the chaplaincies, in schools and on pilgrimages in Lourdes and to World Youth Day, have been some of the most rewarding parts of my ministry these past three years. I would say that we need especially to develop opportunities to reach out to young people and provide them with solid accompaniment and formation. Personally, I am delighted that this is the theme of the next Synod in Rome, “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”. Young people are not only our future, but our present too. The Church understands this particularly as building a culture of vocation. God has a dream in his heart for each person. Can we really assist young people to believe this and discover it? What accompaniment can we give them?

The reality is that once we begin to engage people, they will want more formation. And we have to be prepared to offer it in ways that people can access.

3. Loving Service

We often think that our ‘active’ life of service is somehow opposed to our life of prayer and study of the faith. Yet our relationship with Jesus Christ touches the very depths of our being and calls us to conversion. This means not only accepting the person of Jesus into our life, but allowing ourselves to be changed by Him. There is to be a deepening congruence between our inner and our outer life. This seems to me to be the heart of that section – section 3 – on “Life in Christ” - the moral life - in the Catechism. It puts before us a way, a path, of beatitude; living the commandments we live in true happiness and freedom.

Again, rather than giving an exposition on that section I would like to ask, “What does this life of beatitude look like in someone?” And here, I would say that the models for us are not the Pope and the Bishops. We know Pope Francis has been keen to point that out!

The models for a redeemed life, a holy life, are the saints. These past few weeks I have been particularly captivated by the life of one of the newly Beatified – Stanley Francis Rother – the first native born American to be recognised as a Martyr and beatified in Oklahoma just over two weeks ago.

I have been reading a number of his letters, and the accounts of his life. Maybe it is the contemporary photos of him growing up, or in seminary, or

at his ordination and ministry as a priest in the 1970's, but he feels like something of an elder brother. Stanley Rother grew up in a farming family in rural Oklahoma. He was a simple man, drawn to practical tasks and the outdoors. He was ordained for the Diocese of Oklahoma in 1963, after some difficulty – a problem with learning Latin – and spent his first years in parishes in his diocese. The diocese developed a link with one in Guatemala and in 1968 he went there, and spent the next 13 years being a priest among the Mayan Indians in the mountainous town of Santiago Atitlan. He learnt the local dialect, but there was no equivalent for Stanley, so the people called him by his other baptismal name, Francis, Padre A'plas.

The 70's and 80's were a terrible time in Central America, and many of those who worked with the people to improve their lot, were regarded as revolutionaries or communists. Lots of Padre A'plas' people disappeared. He was the one, who weeks or months later, went with the families to pick the bodies up in his pickup truck, when they were discovered in a ditch or a well. He worked close to the people, using his background in farming, to help the people buy some land which they could farm as their own. This, too, caused conflict with the military authorities. Because he had learnt Spanish, he acted as interpreter for the people to the authorities, and so the criticisms they made in public meetings, were often attributed to him.

But as well as looking after many of the people's physical needs he sought to address their spiritual hungers too. He baptised thousands of children, visited hundreds of couples to prepare them for marriage, sat for hours in the confessional, and translated the New Testament into the local Mayan language so the people had access to the riches of the Gospels and the New Testament letters.

At the beginning of 1981, some fellow priests informed Fr Stanley that they had heard 'on the grapevine' that his name was on a death list, and so he returned home to the US for a few months. But his heart was with his people and he petitioned his bishop to return to them for Holy Week. In one of the letters written at that time, is the saying for which he has become most famous, "At the first sign of danger, the shepherd cannot abandon the flock."

The bishop agreed, and so Fr Stanley went back to Guatemala n time to celebrate Holy Week. Several months later, in the early hours of 28th July 1981, three masked men broke into the rectory. Finding a young man, who worked in the house, they forced him to lead them to the priest, and they shot Fr Stanley twice in the head.

His body was brought back to his native Oklahoma and will soon be transferred to a Chapel in the Cathedral there, for public veneration. At the request of the people, Fr Stanley's heart was left behind to be buried in a shrine in Santiago Atitlan, together with those bandages which had dressed his wounds and rather poignantly, a jar of his blood which had been collected on the night of his martyrdom.

Ironically enough, later that morning, Fr Stanley had been due to go to the hospital which he had helped establish, in order to donate some of his blood for his parishioners. Now he had given everything. The Shepherd had lain down his life fully for his sheep. He had forewarned the Carmelite sisters with whom he worked about his possible death. He said that if it were to happen, they were to gather the people together in the Church, to light the Paschal candle and to sing the Easter Hymns which they had been taught.

The saints show us the real meaning of living the Paschal mystery. What it is to live an integrated, free and blessed life, a life in loving service of others.

4. The Sacramental Life.

That fourth pillar, the sacramental life, reminds us that the Sacraments, the Church's liturgy, Eucharistic adoration, sacred music, the beauty of the Church building, are all important in discovering the numinous, a sense of the transcendent, the reality that we are created to worship God.

We know this especially of the Eucharist; it is a vital path for making disciples and sharing faith. It is itself evangelising. It is there that we breathe the fresh air of the divine presence and are healed of our wounds.

It is in the Eucharist especially that we meet and encounter Jesus. Ultimately we want more and more people to come to know Jesus in this way. Jesus' Eucharistic presence is not only experienced at Mass. It has been beautiful to see how important Eucharistic adoration has been in evangelisation efforts in parishes. Many have experienced the Catholic Church in a new way through the experience of Adoration through 'Night Fever' initiatives, and through '24 hours for the Lord'. It has been lovely, too, to see how parishes have taken up 'The Light is on for you.' initiative, where parish churches have been kept open on set evenings for Eucharistic Adoration and Sacramental Confession. It is good to be giving this talk here at St Patrick's in Soho as we know many come to encounter the Lord through the Eucharist and confession in this place.

Within this, we recognise the power and the place of beauty. The Church uses the phrase *via pulcritudinis* – the way of beauty. We believe that we come to know God through what is true, good and beautiful. In Catholic theology these are called ‘the transcendentals’ because they bring us into contact with God. Perhaps, in the past, we have concentrated on the first two - on truth and goodness. In this missionary key, in order to be disciple-making disciples, we do not try to argue people into faith, or badger them about what they are doing right or wrong. We provide opportunities for them to see or experience the beauty of the Eucharist, of the encounter with Jesus in confession, and the face of the Father’s mercy.

I think we also need to be self-critical about what it's like to come to our Church. What is our Liturgy, the celebration of Mass, like? We know that the Eucharist can transform. It opens people up. It puts us all in touch with another part of reality. Increasingly in society, people are left in a two-dimensional universe, so the experience of God at Mass in a Catholic Church should always focus on our worship of God, and bring others into this reality step by step.

What is it like for a newcomer to visit one of our Churches? Are our Sunday masses geared mainly to those who practise? How do we welcome those who are trying to make their way back to Church, or who are ‘visiting’ a Catholic Church? Is anything in place for them?

I have been encouraged by some of the steps that some parishes are taking in this regard, for example, having particular Sundays , or other celebrations of Mass in the week, where people are invited to ‘return’ or where they are brought along for the first time by a friend. Let us never take for granted the really transforming power of Jesus’ Eucharistic Presence. Let us open this to more and more in our society so desperately looking for an ‘oasis’ in the deserts of modern life.

Conclusion

As I come to the end of these reflections in which we commemorate the anniversary of this great work which is the Catechism, I would like us to revisit it with an eye to evangelisation. Let us all have a heart 'for the other', to bring them to Jesus, that He might bring them to the Father and that they might be 'at home' with Him.

Let us ask ourselves, are the different initiatives we provide, 'open' to those who do not yet believe, or are we a circle of friends closed in on ourselves? Do we focus on maintaining the status quo in parish or diocesan life, or are we capable of new initiatives which 'reach out' to those who do not know Jesus, so that they might have the opportunities for real encounters with Him?

If we have encountered Jesus and experienced something of the depth of His love in our lives, and in the lives of those we love, then we know that we have no option other than to help others have this experience too. Jesus is 'an event' which has happened in our lives and we want others to encounter Him, too, because we know that our ongoing encounter with Him is the only thing which brings real meaning and purpose to our lives. Trying to help others come into this encounter with Jesus is not just one more task among all the other things we have to do. It is the heart of what we do, and should be the criterion against which we judge all that we do.

Glory be to Him who's power at work within us, can do infinitely more than we can ask for or ever imagine. Glory be to Him, in Christ Jesus and in the Church, forever and ever. Amen.

+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth