



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

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5th May 2017

Pastoral Letter to be read in all the Churches of the Diocese of Plymouth on the weekend of the 4th Sunday of Easter, 6th-7th May, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I was 17 and at school, most of my peers rejected faith outright. It was the early 1980s, when pictures came from the BBC, of hundreds of thousands starving in Ethiopia. Such images have become a little too familiar to us, nowadays. Among us sixth formers it caused a very deep stirring, and the most regular complaint, "How can there be a good God, who would allow this to happen?"

Alongside this were the big questions of growing up, "Is there any meaning to life? What shall I do with my life? Are human beings worth anything? Am I?"

These are some of the questions that we continue to ask as we mature and grow. Many in our society ask them, too, often implicitly. We know it is only ultimately in Jesus that each of these questions finds its proper place. In the Gospel today He reminds us, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

We need especially to develop opportunities to reach out to young people and provide them with solid accompaniment and formation so that they can see and experience Jesus as the One in whom is all meaning and life. Personally, I am delighted that this is the theme of the next Synod in Rome, in 2018, namely, "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? Especially in our diocese, we must continue to pray for vocations to the priesthood and to the Religious life, and to encourage our young – and not so young – to give of themselves generously in this way.

You will know, too, that it is most of all in the parish that we experience Jesus' Risen life. The parish is the precious place of God's grace, the place where we discover our vocation. It is a place in which every baptised Catholic is called to deepen their own love and friendship of Jesus Christ and, at the same time to "make disciples".

It is not a matter of either having a deep relationship with Jesus or going out to help others encounter Him. It is both. Our vocation as disciples, therefore, has a two-fold focus. Each of us is called to stay close to Jesus and deepen our love of Him, and at the same time, to go out to others that they may come to follow Him, too. It is part of the Vocation of each of us to be a 'disciple-making disciple'. Further, a local Church which is not making disciples is failing in a fundamental aspect of its life. And the question we must ask ourselves, therefore, is 'are our parishes' places that make disciples'?

For this reason I have written a more extended Pastoral Message, entitled "Go...make Disciples", which I am making available to the Diocese today. In it I indicate eight traits of a Parish which is reaching out to others in order to bring others into a personal encounter with Jesus. I hope you will take some time in these next weeks to read this message and to reflect on your own vocation and your following of Jesus. Do share and discuss it with family, friends and fellow-parishioners. If you have any of your own reflections on the traits I indicate, or any other thoughts that you would like to add, then I would be delighted to hear from you.

I hope that each of us can grow in our love of Jesus, to really see and experience in Him, the fullness of life. And in doing so, may we deepen our desire to bring others to Him, in response to His wonderful command, "Go ...make disciples". So with Him, let's do it!

Please pray for me.

Yours devotedly

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Mark". The plus sign is positioned to the left of the name "Mark".

Rt Rev Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth