



HOMILY TRANSCRIPT - LAUNCH OF HOPE IN THE FUTURE

SALFORD CATHEDRAL - 4TH OCTOBER 2017

BISHOP JOHN ARNOLD

The world is changing, very quickly and if we are going to evangelise in our world, if we are going to really present the gospel then we need to change the way we do that. Pope Francis is very definite about this, he has been telling us we need to be Missionary Disciples, it is at the heart of Evangelium Guardiam.

Two very interesting words in that phrase, Missionary Disciples. To be a disciple is rather a personal thing. It is about learning about the Lord, deepening our faith and love for the Lord, and being able to follow the Lord. And it is something that develops right through our lives according to our different circumstances and experiences. We see and understand the Lord in different ways as we grow and adapt in our faith. But it is essentially quite personal to be a disciple. But then Pope Francis adds that other word, which is rather uncomfortable, missionary. He wants us to go out with what we believe and show what we believe by our actions and our choices to the world in which we live. A world which is crying out for so many things, like the eradication of poverty, justice, dignity for everyone, enough to eat in a world where so many of us throw food away. We have got to be living our faith out there and making sure that no one is ever marginalised, isolated and alone. So we have been given this task, and he is definite about it and so clear about it. When he was only about three months as Pope he went to Rio de Janeiro, World Youth Day and while he was there he spoke to lots of South American Bishops. He can be pretty direct in the way he speaks to Bishops and Priests, and fair play to him, we need to be spoken to by what we are about. But he was very clear with those Bishops, he said, there is no point you lot sitting in your cathedrals with the doors open waiting for people to come in, do you have the courage to go out there and walk with people even when they are still walking away from the church. That opens up so much more in terms of our pastoral concern. It is all very well to be welcoming to those who feel drawn to their faith and the Church. Yes we make a good job of it too. We bring them in, whether it is RCIA, we make them feel welcoming and help them to grow in faith. But Pope Francis says that is only part of the story, do you have the courage to go out there and walk with people even as they are walking away from the Church. And we know these people, they are members of our family, they are among our work colleagues and our friends. People who often through no great fault of their own have just felt themselves distanced from the Church, they have been caught up in the consumerism and materialism of our age. They are just drawn away. They may have had a bad experience or got distracted from an idea of faith and drifted away. Do we have the courage to go out there and walk with them even when they are walking away from the Church? It is very demanding, but Pope Francis uses that wonderful text in Luke's Gospel, when the two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem, they think it is all over, Jesus has been crucified, whatever they thought was going to happen can't happen, now he is dead. And it is Jesus

that walks with them. He doesn't stop them and say don't go a single inch further whilst I persuade you. He walks with them and explains to them for the rest of that day that this is all part of Gods plan. And at the end of the day through his patience, his explanation and his example they recognise him and they go back to Jerusalem renewed in their sense of discipleship.

So Pope Francis wants each and every one of us, no matter who we are, our age, our skills, our experiences, he wants each and every one of us to be Missionary Disciples. Missionary Disciples in Mission Parishes. Now if we are going to create Mission Parishes, there are two important steps. First of all we want to look in on ourselves, we need to make sure our parishes are vibrant places for our community. Places where there is real depth of prayer. Places where there are real worthy celebrations of the sacrament. Good catechist, not just for the young in the initiation of the sacraments but for each and every one of us as we grow in faith. That they are places of welcome, where no one is forgotten. Where people maybe elderly and unable to come to Church anymore we don't lose touch with them, No, we are there with the lonely and the marginalised. Even those who are part of our communities.

And when we have vibrant communities will we have the courage to go out there to walk with people even when they are walking away from the Church. Maybe they have no association with faith at all. Are going to be there for the marginalised, the poor of the world? That is what Pope Francis says we should be. But of course that is going to be so different for each our Parishes. Our parishes are so different, suburban, urban, rural parishes. Some of them are ancient, so of them are very new. And each in its own context has its work to do. We need to identify what that work is and respond in our own parish mission.

Now I would love to be really prescriptive about this and say Hope in the Future is 12 steps, we will get this one done now, that's clear, we've got all the resources, but I can't do that and I would be wrong to do that because we all have to develop and journey at the speed that we want to go. We've to find out what our mission is and respond generously. Working out in each case what we have got to be doing.

So we have got five stages and I am sure that some parishes will go quicker than others. Some are already more developed in their journey and their leadership. But let's concentrate first on stage one. It is a stage in which we have got room to congratulate ourselves on all that we are, the gifts that we have, everything that is happening now in our parishes. Not an inconsiderable amount going on. I think we will all be surprised to find out how varied the ministries we already have going on in our parishes, but we need to register those and share best practice.

And in all this there is a very important priority, we need to be freeing up our priests to do what they are ordained to do. People talk about a shortage of priests, I don't think so. I think God gives us the number of priests that we need but he requires us to use those priests for what they are ordained to be and to do. To be the sacramental leaders in our community, to be the pastoral director, to be there to do what priests alone can do. And then we need to recognise the many gifts and talents of our members in each and every one of our communities because there is so much in terms of ministry and administration that the people of our parishes can do so much better frankly than the priests. That's what we should be doing. And in the Vatican Council there was that very clear document that says that everyone has gifts, we need to discover those gifts and use them in our mission.

And finally, I want to recognise that the way ahead is not clear, I wish it was. But if we go to that Gospel reading let's just place ourselves with the disciples for a moment. Until recently I have just seen them as just those who follow Jesus, but there is something well worthwhile about sharing the experience of the disciples and standing with them. Imagine yourself standing there as that Gospel, that we heard this evening, is enacted. Jesus had died on the cross, the disciples were devastated, they thought it was all over, then he rose from the dead

and came back and explained to them that it was all part of God's plan being carried out, don't worry. They were just getting used to the fact that he was back with them. Then he says, 'I'm going now back to the Father and I'm leaving you with a mission. Go out to the whole world, proclaim the good news and baptise.' I wonder what they said, 'What on earth are you on about Jesus, look at us, there are eleven of us. We are barley fishers, we are living on the fringes of an enormous empire, and we don't even speak the languages of the Roman Empire and you want us to convert the whole world, how?' Jesus responds, 'I am with you always, until the end of the age and I'm going to send you the advocate who will remind you of everything I said and lead you in all truth' and there is that Pentecost moment in the disciples lives when they are able to discern the next step. They can't see the way to converting the world, the setting up of the Church throughout the empire but it's going to be the first step.

So I am asking that, in this Diocese, we take that first step in faith and hope and trust and that we believe that the advocate is with us, he will remind us what Jesus said and will lead us in all truth. And step by step we will recognise how best we can be Missionary Disciples in our Mission Parishes. And if this is going to work, and I believe it is going to work, we have to make sure that it is built on the foundation of prayer. That wonderful little prayer that you have adopted so well in this Diocese, 'stay with us Lord on our journey', it's more important than ever so that we can entrust ourselves in prayer so that we can be all that God is asking us to be.

I thank God for the good that is already here in this Diocese, for the wonderful work and commitment of so many, many of whom we have not recognised, yet. Let's thank God for the faith that is here but let's step out in faith, on our journey asking the Lord to stay with us so that we are going at the right speed in the right direction so that we can be achieving everything that he requires of us as we start this journey with Hope in the Future.

God bless you, let's stay in prayer and let's build our Church in the way Pope Francis would have us build it, as a mission Church.