

Text of a Presentation to be given at all Masses on the weekend of 14/15th October 2017 in relation to the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*

Good morning everyone. As Lucy Harrison explained in her presentation last weekend on the Apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, a group of four parishioners – myself (as Vice-Chair of the Parish Pastoral Committee), Lucy, her husband David and Frances Ahearne along with Father Peter attended the triennial Jesuit Parishes' Conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire over three days last June. It was the first time I had attended this event because of work commitments but found it one of the most worthwhile Conferences I have attended and would wholeheartedly commend it to you all.

As delegates at the Conference we were asked to discuss and consider three very important documents so far issued by Our Holy Father, Pope Francis – the Apostolic Exhortations, *Amoris Laetitia* ('The Joy of Love') and *Evangelii Gaudium* ('The Joy of the Gospel') and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* ('*On Care for our Common Home*'). Out of these three documents I was privileged, along with Father Peter, to consider and review *Evangelii Gaudium* or *The Joy of the Gospel* and it is with reference to this document that I would like to share a few thoughts with you this [evening]/[morning].

Evangelii Gaudium is a substantial document in which the Holy Father deals with seven questions over five chapters packed with theology, social analysis, practical advice and what has been described as "much 'holy wisdom' gained in a lifetime of shepherding the Catholic Church in Argentina, as both head of the Jesuits there and later as Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires."

The issues facing the worldwide Church which the Holy Father deals with in detail in the course of seven questions can essentially be summarised as follows:

- How the global Church as a whole needs to change for mission i.e. to get ready for missionary outreach including a de-centralisation of the Papacy;
- A critique of contemporary society, culture and economy dealing with the imperative of the inclusion of the poor and sick in society and a concern for the vulnerable and marginalized;
- A call to peace and dialogue in society through active dialogue with states, cultures and science and through ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue;
- The Theology of the People dealing with the importance in terms of evangelization of popular forms of piety as a means of liberating the faithful from the tide of secularism and dependence on the secular world and its values;
- A summons to all to evangelize – i.e. a summons to proclaim the basic message of the Gospel (Kerygma);
- Instructions to the Church's Pastors on the preaching of sermons and the style of Pastoral Ministry.

However, I would like to just take up two of these themes this [evening]/[morning] - you can read about the others in a full copy of the Exhortation itself (**show copy**) which can be ordered for you if you would like a copy (**see me after Mass**) or in a more concise five minute A4 paper summary of the document which I will be handing out after Mass to those would like to take one – and those are the linked themes of Missionary Outreach and the Summons to Evangelize.

Central to the Holy Father's exhortation is his invitation to "all Christians, everywhere....to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them.....No-one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her since no-one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord" says Pope Francis.

Pope Francis reminds us that evangelization (the basic proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know him or have always rejected him) takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus to the Apostles – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” and reminds us that “by virtue of their baptism all the members of the people of God have become missionary disciples” and further telling us that “if the whole Church takes up this missionary impulse she has to go forth to everyone without exception whilst noting that those to whom she should go first are “the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked.”

The Holy Father makes very clear in saying that each particular Church as a portion of the Catholic Church under its bishop is called to missionary conversion stating that “the bishop must always foster missionary communion in his diocesan church.” **PAUSE** (Indeed the new initiative commissioned in the Salford diocese on October 4th - *Hope in the Future* - is in part an attempt to address this issue along with the particular issues facing the Diocese of Salford in terms of the smaller number of priests and the closure and amalgamation of certain parishes – and more will be said about this new Diocesan initiative in the coming weeks).

In going forth a missionary Church, Pope Francis tells us, is a Church whose doors are always open. Indeed Pope Francis reminds us that:

“The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she shall not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason.... Frequently we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.”

Evangelization however is about more than simply the transmission of the Faith by proclamation. As Pope Francis says the deposit of the Faith is one thing – the way it is expressed is another. We are also reminded that “it is not by proselytizing that the Church grows but by attraction”. This sense of attraction is to be likely to be fostered by the example that the faithful and its pastors give – we might sum this up by the old adage of ‘Faith in action’. Indeed, Pope Francis reminds us that the model is Jesus Christ himself – his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity and finally, his complete self-giving.

In reading *Evangelii Gaudium* and the worldwide challenges for the Catholic Church that it sets out one might well ask:

So what has this to do with me in the tiny rural parish of St. Peter’s, Stonyhurst?

Well the answer to that is to be found in the words of Pope Francis himself:

“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....."

So what can we do to play our part in the call being made to us within this Parish?

Obviously we do not have many of the problems to be addressed by Parishes in the poorer parts of the world or the problems inherent in the great urban areas but we too can and must play a part in being missionary disciples and evangelizers by what we do here in this Parish by ensuring our sick and housebound are not forgotten and to ensure that our Parish continues to be a welcoming Parish and not to overlook or ever make to feel unwelcome strangers and to get to know those who are not even on the radar within the Parish. With that in mind some suggestions of things we could do are:

- The better use Eucharistic Ministers by inviting them to reassume responsibilities to take Holy Communion to the sick and those unable to attend mass (where acceptable to the Parishioner);
- To have a more effective and informed focus on social outreach in the Parish and by continuing to work closely with our friends at St. John's so as to create strength in unity;
- To organise a rota of welcomers/greeters at all Masses in order to ensure that all who cross the Church threshold feel welcome, parishioner or visitor alike;
- To make more use of socialising after Masses by tea and coffee to which all are invited.

So how can you help?

The Parish would like to form a group to deal with this aspect of missionary outreach and evangelization and that may be further enhanced by the Parish response to the latest Diocesan initiative. But the Parish needs your input, your ideas, your talents and your time if only so that the burden does not fall disproportionately on a relatively few shoulders. If you think you would like to or could become part of a Parish Group looking and responding to the Pope's challenge then please have a word with me after Mass this [evening]/[morning].

Thank you for listening.