



7th Week of Easter: 16th/17th May 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“As you sent me into the world,
I sent them into the world”**

A most important document, an Apostolic Letter, has come from Pope Francis recently. It is entitled “Antiquum Ministerium” (Ancient Ministry) establishing the lay ministry of catechist in the Church. The decree takes effect from 11th May and opens the way for many of the more than three million lay women and men catechists around the world to be formally installed with this ministry by their local Bishop. It is called an Ancient Ministry because from early times women and men have carried out different ministries; the catechist is an indispensable “diakonia” or service in the life of the Church: it involves “transmitting in a more organic and stable form related to different situations in life the Teaching of the Apostles and evangelists”.

Knowing how important the role of catechist is, I am very happy to see this taking place. First, because it gives due recognition of this ministry in the life of the Church, and second because I hope it will encourage more people to come forward for training and spiritual preparation for it. It takes on a number of different forms: most often we think of it in terms of preparing children for the Sacraments, but it also includes a more formal instruction in the Faith for children and young people not attending Catholic schools where Religious Education is expected to include catechesis i.e. it is about sharing Faith, not just a study of Religion. And, catechesis extends to adults wishing to enter the Catholic Church and the preparation for it; it also includes the preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony. Then there is ongoing Education in Doctrine, Morals and Social Teaching for adults, sometimes called Adult R.E.

I was interested to note Pope Francis refers in the document to the fact that in certain parts of the world the catechist’s role has extended to being “community leaders”, especially in situations where there is a shortage of Priests. I was involved in setting up a 2-year course to train and form catechists at the Maryvale Institute in the early 1980s and I discovered some of the most exciting developments in Adult Lay Formation for this Ministry were taking place in Africa. Pope Francis’ experience of course is of the Church in South America where there was a similarly pressing need to have more lay involvement in this formal role in the life of the Church. Pope Francis points out that this Ministry is not primarily a Liturgical one, keen as he is to avoid “Clericalisation” of the Evangelizing work of the Church. He recalls “that beginning with the Second Vatican Council, the Church has come to a renewed appreciation of lay involvement in the work of Evangelization”.

I am pleased to speak about this on the occasion of reading the Gospel for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, where Jesus prays about His commissioning the Apostles to carry on His work saying in a prayer to His Father at the Last Supper: “As you sent me into the

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world, I sent them into the world.” What strikes you in reading this passage is the challenge Jesus sees is involved in spreading the Gospel message. It is a hostile world out there! We see this at work, especially in the attempt to organise the world without God. Jesus says “I passed your word onto them and the world hated them because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world. I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one.”

We are conscious of an inclination in us to “please the world” to be acceptable to those who are not ready even to consider “the Truth” that Jesus came to bring and that the Church proclaims. There is no doubt the “evil one” Jesus speaks of is at work today, as much as he was then.

At the moment, following the celebration of the Ascension of Our Lord, we are awaiting the Feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, through whom the fearful Apostles were transformed. It is the time for us too to consider taking part with many in the Church in the Pentecost Novena. Archbishop Bernard has given us this prayer to say for the next nine days. May we all become witnesses to the Faith we cherish.

**PRAY WITH ARCHBISHOP BERNARD - NOVENA FROM ASCENSION TO
PENTECOST**

‘That God may raise us up’

Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. (Lk 24:51)

Lift us up with you, Lord Jesus Christ,

from the sickness, suffering, fear and grief of these last months.

Bless all that your body, the Church, has achieved through her worship of God

and her care of God’s children.

Renew the Holy Spirit among us,

that, sent like your apostles, to the people of our diocese,

all may contribute to the proclamation of God’s word

and to the growth of God’s kingdom.

Amen

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