

## **Presentation by Fr Chis Brading, one of The Society Missioners**

Good afternoon, thank you Tom for inviting me to speak today about Mission in The Society.

I want to start by going back around 18 months, quite a while before I was in this role, and around the time that Fr D'Silva had started as the first part-time National Missioner. One of the first initiatives that he worked on with The Society bishops was based on Canadian Roman Catholic priest, Fr James Mallon's '*Divine Renovation programme*'. In a nutshell Divine Renovation is an international programme which details an approach for taking a parish from Maintenance to Mission.

In November 2021, around 80 Society priests were gathered in 10 small regional groups and, using technology, met with Fr Mallon to discuss Mission in an Anglo-Catholic context. Subsequently each priest committed to attending three regional group meetings in a year and, *most importantly*, to implementing three actions that would further mission in their parishes.

Last November the groups reconvened at the '*Catholic Mission Network*' conference in Walsingham, to share their experiences and progress from the previous year and review future priorities.

It was a positive event, and really encouraging to hear how the Divine Renovation materials and methodology were being used as a springboard for mission and evangelism in a good number of Anglo-Catholic parishes across the country. That work is continuing, through various mission projects and evangelism courses, including Alpha, which, by the way, is proving really successful in a number of different contexts.

One of the privileges of doing this job is that from time to time I get to join the regional group meetings, at which the priests encourage and support each other, and share their experiences and successes. The other week I was in a meeting in the Northwest where Fr Daniel Howard talked about the newly launched Food Pantry at St Columba's, Anfield called '*Columba's kitchen*'. It had taken over a year to get the project up and running. And one of the things that got it over the finish line so to speak was a significant anonymous donation, which was given because the benefactor, became aware of what the church was trying to do *in*, and *for*, the community.

In March, I visited Fr Toby Boutle the Parish Priest of Swindon New Town, which comprises of four traditional catholic churches. He, and the newly appointed missioner priest, Fr Copley, told me about the exciting transformation project they are working on there, you may have read about it in the Christmas edition of the Together publication. The project is ambitious and is currently funded for five years by grants. The main one of £250k is from the Church of England Strategic Development Fund – actually it is from something called the 'Innovation fund' – how refreshing is that? A traditional Anglo-Catholic parish being once again associated with Innovation! Generous grants have also been awarded by ACS and CBS.

When talking to Fr Toby, what really struck me was how the PCC, under his direction, had taken a step back and, rather than focusing on managing decline, dared to imagine what could be possible:

- If they were bold
- If money wasn't an issue
- If they looked at what was needed in the community
- If they broke out of 'their locked room'

It has been, and continues to be, extremely hard work with frustrations and setbacks along the way – *it took well over a year in the planning and to secure the funding*. The project demands close working with senior staff in the Bristol Diocese, who regard it as a flagship project for the diocese. And this project, inspired by the Divine Renovation programme, is already delivering tangible results.

These are just two very brief examples, there are many others out there, across the country. These projects involved planning and a critical mass of people, with the time, skills and commitment to get them off the ground. And we should *all* be encouraged by these great signs of engagement and growth.

But I think there is perhaps a danger. A danger that we begin to regard mission solely in terms of large-scale projects. That mission is something best left to well-equipped churches. That it is something beyond the means of us in parishes with scarce resources (be that money, skills or whatever). *It isn't!* Because to be a Christian, *is* to be a missionary disciple. I'm going to share a little story with you, a version<sup>1</sup> of which I came across on the day I was appointed as National Missioner for The Society.

Imagine the scene, a busy street in London on a Friday night during rush hour, a harassed businessman let's call him Paul, is rushing, well more sprinting, to catch his train home. In his haste, he inadvertently knocks over a small produce stand. Apples, pears, oranges go flying all over the pavement. He carries on running, but then something makes him stop, and he turns on his heels and returns to the stall. As he approaches, he realises that the stall holder is blind, and she is standing there crying softly with tears running down her face. "*It's OK, it's ok*" Paul says to her, as he gets down on his hands and knees and begins to pick up the spilled fruit. Meanwhile hordes of people pass by without stopping to help. When all the fruit is retrieved from the pavement, Paul neatly organises it again, discarding any spoiled items. He then turns to the woman and asks: "*Are you OK?*" She nods through her tears. He reaches for his wallet and hands over some money, saying "*I'm so sorry, but this should cover the damages*" and he turns to leave. "*Excuse me*" the woman calls after him, "*Are you Jesus?*" "*Pardon me, what did you say?*" the man asks. "*Are you Jesus?*" the woman repeats "*eh, no*" he stutters, "*why would you ask that?*" "*Because*" she explains, "*as I heard my fruit falling onto the pavement, I prayed for Jesus to help me*".

I think that story captures an essential element of what mission is about: being in the right place, at the right time, with a willingness to act; being the Lord's physical instrument in answering people's prayers. As St Teresa of Avila put it in her beautiful poem: '*Christ has no body now on earth but yours*'.

The Lord makes use of any number people to answer prayers and work miracles in his name. Sometimes this is a conscious cooperation between a disciple and their Saviour, at other times it is a seemingly random and unknowing collaboration, as in the story of the businessman Paul. Perhaps not dissimilar to the wedding at Cana – where the servants are unwittingly drawn into Jesus' first miracle. Actually, I imagine most of us here will have at some point or another, experienced being the instrument through which Jesus has answered a prayer. It may not have been a dramatic incident, something quite simple, but where we have been in the right place at the right time and, been willing and able to help. This is of course part and parcel of being a Christian, and there is more to mission than this. I suggest that Mission is about actively seeking the opportunities to be Jesus' mouth, eyes, hands, feet etc. Increasing the chances of us being in the right place, at the right time, with a willingness to act – no

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly, M, 2015. Rediscover Jesus, Florida, Beacon Publishing

matter what our context, our size, our available resources etc. To do this successfully, we have to be intentional both spiritually and physically. *Spiritually*, through prayer, specifically offering ourselves, as individuals and worshipping communities, to be an instrument through which Jesus can work, and *deliberate* in asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Physically*, by understanding the needs of our communities (or wherever our mission fields may be), observing, listening, and talking (*preferably in that order!*) all the time staying alert and on the lookout for a word or a sign. And this applies to any form of mission activity – no matter how big or how modest.

Mission is not an optional extra for any of us. We are called to be missionary disciples, that's the way Jesus ordained it, it's part of our spiritual DNA. As I'm sure most of you know the word 'mission' derives from the Latin word meaning to send. At the end of every Mass, we are sent out by the priest: 'Go forth the Mass has ended', 'Go in the peace of Christ' or whatever. In Ascensiontide we can't help but be reminded of the Great Commission, when Jesus tells his disciples to '*Go! and make disciples*'.

Mission doesn't have to be complicated or involve big budgets. In Luke's account of the sending out of the 70 disciples, when Jesus tells them to 'go', they don't embark on endless committee meetings and spend time raising funds for their mission, they just take what they have, and get on with it.

Effective mission can be simple, but it does demand that we are intentional, that we pray, that we love, (*and are prepared to share God's love*), that we look at the needs of our community and that we are alert, and ready to act, in response to God's prompting or calling, however that might come.

So, to conclude, I'm not really *the* missionary here, we are all missionaries. My role is to help equip and enable mission to be done more easily.