

ARCHBISHOP *of* CARDIFF-MENEVIA



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'Heart speaks to Heart' - being a missionary and synodal diocese – A Pastoral Message to the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia

'Heart speaks to Heart'. I was reminded of this motto of St John Henry Newman as I attended the proclamation of him being declared a Doctor of the Church in Rome. This took place at the same time as we marked the first anniversary of the proclamation of the erection of our united Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia. God's heart speaks to our heart. He does so uniquely through the Heart of His own Son, Jesus. That encounter leads us to speak to the hearts of our brothers and sisters, many of whom do not know Jesus, and who, apart from us, may never have any chance of coming to know Him.

I invite all of our parishes, schools and communities to be places where Heart speaks to Heart. Firstly, to recognise that Jesus' Heart touches our hearts. To encounter Him is to "set out on a completely new horizon."¹ Through the ongoing encounter with Jesus, we want to touch other's hearts so that they know the life-giving experience of encounter with Him. Our motivation is that we love Jesus and we want others to know the beauty of His friendship and His love.

We believe that it is within the Church that we experience and encounter Jesus. We are given a path in which to follow Him and deepen our love of Him. We walk together as we love being His disciples, and encountering others who are His disciples, and we want others to be His disciples, too. This is why I share this message on being a missionary and synodal diocese, where we are all seeking to be more deeply Jesus' missionary disciples.

Our Vision: Foundation and Four Pillars

I talk about a foundation in prayer and four pillars of our life which help us build a missionary and synodal diocese together. Those pillars are:

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, par 1

1. **Youth and the raising up of young leaders** in the diocese, including vocations to the priesthood.
2. An **evangelising zeal** which brings Jesus to others.
3. A **formation in faith** which recognises that every baptised person is called to be missionary as we accompany one another in a synodal way.
4. A **loving service** of those most especially in need.

OUR FOUNDATION IN PRAYER

Prayer is the foundation of who we are and what we do. We are invited to have both a deep relationship with Jesus and a life in service of others so that they encounter Him through us. Each of us is called to be a 'disciple-making disciple'. We are not communicating a message but a person. We cannot give what we have not got. We must remember that prayer is not something to be done at the beginning and left behind, as we sometimes do when we gather for meetings. We must have sustained prayer, for each initiative in the parish, school or community.

All of us are called to deepen our encounter with Jesus, and to draw close to Him in prayer. Let us increase prayer opportunities in our parishes and our schools; invite one another into the rich devotional life of our Church through the rosary, pilgrimages, intercessory prayer, times of Eucharistic Adoration, guided meditation and prayer, *lectio divina*, and the sacrificial prayer offered from the sick and housebound whose prayer is particularly efficacious. There is the need to encourage and model prayer in the home, in families and from children and young people who un-self-consciously articulate their love for God, for Jesus and Mary, when encouraged to do so.

Of course, the fundamental thing about our prayer is that we recognise that it is God, and not ourselves, who is at the centre of our life. It is ultimately not our work, but God's.

Pause for reflection

Do we really believe it? Do we live as though we believe Jesus is with us, as He promised He would be, or do we live, as practical atheists², proclaiming faith with our lips but with little evidence of this in the way we live our lives?

² 'Practical atheism' is a term which was first used in Catholic circles in the twentieth century by the French philosopher Étienne Borne. It was taken up both by Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

In this respect, cynicism can be a particular fault that priests, and I, as bishop, can suffer from. It is a manifestation of a practical form of atheism. We must ask the Holy Spirit to rid us of it daily.

PILLAR 1: YOUTH AND RAISING UP LEADERS

Meeting young people in our youth work with them, in schools and chaplaincies, and on pilgrimages or World Youth Day, have been some of the most rewarding parts of my ministry these past three years. We need to develop opportunities to reach out to young people and provide them with solid accompaniment and formation. 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.

Pause for reflection

Can we really assist one another and our young people to believe this and discover it? What accompaniment can we give them?

It has been really encouraging to see the development of our Emmaus Youth Mission, inviting young people across the Archdiocese into a real and deep relationship with Jesus. This work takes the very simple model that the Risen Jesus walks beside each young person. Our task is to walk with them and help them discover that He is at their side. Discipleship really begins when we realise that Jesus desires each of us individually. He calls us personally, to “Follow Him” (Mk 1:17). He enlightens our hearts with his loving gaze (Mk 10:21). I can still recall as a 17-year-old, experiencing deeply the overwhelming magnetic pull of Jesus’ love. That love gives meaning and orientation to our life. It makes possible a life of prayer and of service.

We want this for each young person so that they discover what dream God has for them. Some of these will be called to leadership in our Church, or discover their particular vocation, to marriage, to consecrated life, to priesthood. Among these, we pray particularly that more men, young and not so young, will discover their vocation to the diocesan priesthood among us, for we know our need of this particular service that all the baptised live out their vocation more fully.

PILLAR 2: GROWING EVANGELISING DISCIPLES

In his last address to his followers, St David gave some beautiful words which we do well to remember and practise.³ One of the phrases he used, was:

³ St David’s last words to his disciples were, “*Byddwch lawen, a chedwch eich ffydd a’ch cred, a gwnewch y pethau bychain a welsoch ac a glywsoch gennylf*” which can be translated, “Be Joyful. Keep your faith and your Creed. Do the little things well that you see me doing.”

"Byddwch lawen – Be joyful."

We are joyful because we have encountered Jesus. This entails a call to mission, because we want to share Jesus with others who do not know Him.

Mission describes the very heart of God. The Father sends the Son in order to bring His love into our world and into every human heart. The Son willingly accepts the Father's Mission. Out of love for the Father, He comes into our world. Not only is Jesus the human face of God, but He is humbler yet, even to accepting death on a Cross (Philippians 2). The Spirit accompanies the Son in His Mission and continues to animate Jesus' followers so that they may participate in the Son's mission and come to the Father's house. We have come to know God because He has gone outside of Himself, to draw us to Himself.

Our zeal for Mission is a participation in this going forth from, and return, to God. We have a heart for others, to bring them to Jesus, that He might bring them to the Father and that they might be 'at home' with Him. We do not seek to bring others to ourselves.

Pause for reflection

Are the different initiatives of the parish or Catholic school *open* to those who do not yet believe or are we a circle of friends closed in on ourselves?

Do we focus on maintaining the status quo in the parish or school, or are we capable of new initiatives which invite those who do not know Jesus, so that they might have the opportunities for real encounter with Him?

A local Church which is not making disciples is failing in a fundamental aspect of its life. The question we must ask ourselves, therefore, is:

Are our parishes and school's places that make disciples?

If we have encountered Jesus and experienced something of the depth of His love in our lives, then we know that we have no option other than to help others have this experience, too. Jesus is 'an event' which has happened in our lives. We want others to encounter Him, because we know that our ongoing encounter with Him is the only thing which brings real meaning and purpose to our life. As Pope Francis expressed so powerfully to each of us in 'The Joy of the Gospel':

"Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more

important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear time after time in different ways.”⁴

Trying to help others come into this encounter with Jesus is not just one more task among all the other things we have to do. It is the heart of what we do and should be the criterion against which we judge what we do.

PILLAR 3: FORMATION

Historically, Catholics belonged to a variety of organisations, sodalities or groups. In each there was a sharing and a formation in faith. Nowadays, life is more fragmented and disparate. People are at different levels and at different points on the journey. As I have travelled across the diocese and listened to people’s stories of their faith and life, again and again, I have been aware of the silent struggles that many experience.

Alongside this, is an awareness of ‘sitting’ with many of the questions shared by their neighbours:

Pause for reflection

Does life really have any meaning? What of science and religion, faith and reason? Surely it is science that gives us the truth, whereas faith, is it not just private opinion? You believe what you want and I believe what I want; it doesn’t really matter, does it? What is it to be truly free? What happens after death? Are human beings worth anything? Am I?

These are some of the questions that many in our society ask, often implicitly. We know it is only ultimately in Jesus that each of these questions finds its fullest resolution.

So, we need to provide contexts where people can properly explore the questions that are at the heart of modern living, and where they can receive accompaniment and guidance from the richness of the Church’s tradition. I would hope that some of the initiatives offered in Evangelisation and Catechesis will continue to give opportunities to grow in confidence in sharing our faith with others, as they grapple with these questions and so that we can give a credible witness in Wales and England.

It has been wonderful, as I have travelled in the Diocese, to experience something of the faith of good people giving so generously of their time in so many Catechetical programmes – First Communion, Confirmation, RCIA, Baptism and Marriage. So many people work so hard, and so faithfully, to ‘pass on’ the faith. A key reflection for a parish or school is:

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par 164.

Pause for reflection

What do we commit from our resources to assist them, and to help form them, so that they have confidence in what they are doing, and are using the best possible methods and resources?

St David reminded his followers:

"A chedwch eich ffydd a'ch cred – keep your faith and your creed"

We all need Formation in faith to do this. We know that we learn step by step, and that learning is life-long. What do we offer, in the parish, school, or at diocesan level, that will assist people at different levels and stages, so that their journey of discipleship is also deepening and expanding? One initiative we are launching is a partnership with the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University Steubenville. I believe that such a partnership can really help us develop more in-depth resources across the Archdiocese.

The Church's vision is that every moment of teaching, of catechesis, is also a moment of evangelisation. Let us take this to heart more fully in our country. We catechise others, by teaching them the different aspects of the Catholic faith, but we need also to evangelise them, leading others by hand to a living encounter with Jesus that can change their lives as it has changed ours.

Pause for reflection

Do our people leave our catechetical programmes with a sense of having been called by Jesus, that He is in their life and He wants them to know how very close to them He actually is?

As disciples, if we have not really had a sense that we are called by Jesus, that He desires us personally, then being formed and sent forth will be like building on sand.

4: LOVING SERVICE

We often think that our 'active' life of service is in tension with our 'inner' life of contemplation and prayer. But in both dimensions of life, we are seeking to encounter Jesus and to serve Him. Matthew 25 makes this very clear - the Lord that we worship and adore in the Eucharist and in prayer, we also encounter in the least of His brothers and sisters.

St David reminded his followers:

"A gwnewch y pethau bychain a welsoch ac a glywsoch gennyf – Do the little things well that you see me doing."

We are encouraged and challenged by the witness of another's life of service and generosity. It has been good these past three years to discover the variety of ways in which Catholics in the Diocese are engaged in projects of loving service of our neighbour - food banks, homeless projects, SVP, outreach to those with special needs, support of CAFOD, Aid to the Church in Need, Missio, Apostleship of the Sea, and so many more. We experience the Lord on the Cross in these, the least of His children. In their love and suffering, and their great joy, they teach us how to live our faith in simple and practical ways. They show us the living body of Jesus present in His Resurrected wounds in which He manifests the depth of His love and His suffering. Our personal encounter with Jesus in prayer, helps us to see Him in those who are least, and when we meet Him in them, we also want to seek Him in prayer, in the Blessed Sacrament, at Mass, and in our prayerful reading of the Scriptures.

I want us to encourage and strengthen *Caritas Cardiff-Menevia*, our diocesan network which seeks to support and encourage practical initiatives of loving service at local level. This will include practical ways in which we can assist in the situation of refugees, in those caught up in modern forms of slavery, or with initiatives seeking to care for 'our common home'. I have been deeply moved to hear of the desire of parishioners across the diocese to be involved in these areas of loving service.

Neither should we see this as in conflict with our desire for people to deepen their personal relationship with Jesus, or as a hindrance to sharing our faith. Perhaps we need to grow in confidence about being more explicit about the motivation for the good works we do. This too, is part of sharing our faith. It is not a matter of proselytising but of helping others, and ourselves, to see the intimate link between prayer and loving service.

A WORD ON METHOD

So, this is the vision, and these are the priorities which I see for our Archdiocese having been here for just over three years. But how do we go about it? Soon after I came, I brought together a 'Mission Think Tank', a group of priests, religious and lay faithful who meet with me regularly to help keep a focus on being a missionary and synodal diocese. For mission is the task of every baptised Catholic in the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia. The synodal way of being in the Church is the way to go about it, and this pathway is renewed and refreshed by keeping its proper missionary dynamic. I hope this vision can help guide the renewal of the different organs of consultation and synodal listening at diocesan, deanery and local parish level. None of us in leadership can do everything by ourselves, nor should we. Working alone, it is hard to remain motivated. We run out of energy or focus. Different people bring different gifts. But together we can support and move things forward. As the Final Document of 'For a Synodal Church' reminds us, and it is true of me as Archbishop, too:

"Priests are called to live their service in a spirit of proximity to their people, to be welcoming and prepared to listen to all, opening themselves up to a synodal style."⁵

I draw our attention, too, to the words of Pope Leo XIV regarding the intimate link between being missionary and being synodal in the way that we do things and again, I apply this as much to myself as brother priests:

"In order to implement an ecclesiology of communion ever more effectively, the ministry of the priest must move beyond the model of exclusive leadership, which leads to the centralisation of pastoral activities and the burden of all responsibilities entrusted to him alone. Instead, the ministry should move toward an increasingly collegial leadership, with cooperation between priests, deacons and the entire People of God resulting in mutual enrichment that is the fruit of the various charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit.....In the Church, authority is exercised through service, modelling not the political realm, but the model of the Lord Himself, who 'though he was God was humbler yet, even to accepting death on a Cross' (Phil 2)."⁶

There is an important sacramental complementarity here between the ordained and the baptised. I have been struck again and again by this as I have visited parishes, schools and different communities. People love their priest and know that his ministry is irreplaceable in order for them to develop and deepen their relationship with Jesus. At the same time, our priests experience their greatest happiness in seeing their people grow in holiness, and in deepening their discipleship. Priest and people live alongside one another and challenge and support one another to live the particularity of their vocation in fidelity and at depth. One cannot exist without the other.

When we generously embark on a life of seeking to share Jesus and our Catholic faith with others, it is important to remember that we are not the only ones concerned about disappearing Catholics, or where the young are going, or how we can grow in confidence to raise our voice in society. I have seen that many really want to be involved and do something but do not know how or have not been given the encouragement and permission to try. It is important that those of us involved in leadership in parishes, in schools, and in the Archdiocese, continue to provide opportunities for others to participate. The various 'organs' of dialogue at diocesan⁷, deanery and parish level are important for this, so that we can listen deeply and

⁵ 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission - Final Document', par. 72).

⁶ Pope Leo XIV, "A fidelity that generates the future; Apostolic Letter on the 60th Anniversary of the Conciliar Decrees *Optatum Totius* and *Presbyterian Ordinis*," par 22, 8th December 2025.

⁷ I have been pleased to see the vibrant development of the Pastoral Councils at Diocesan and Deanery level, and grateful to those who participate in them, as also those who give so generously of their talents and baptismal gifts in Parish Pastoral Councils at local parish level. I am conscious that the latter need some refreshment and renewal in some parts of the Archdiocese.

creatively to everyone, mindful that we do so in order to deepen our own love for Jesus and to bring more people to Him.

CONCLUSION

I conclude by saying this is what is on my heart.

Pause for reflection

What is on yours?

I am breaking this message down into six pieces, with some reflection questions. These will be available in the coming weeks. I hope they can be used across the archdiocese, in the different communities, possibly during Lent or Eastertide, or at some other suitable period, so that as many as possible have the chance to participate. If you have any of your own reflections on what I have shared, or any other thoughts that you would like to add, then I would be delighted to hear from you.

I hope that we can each strengthen our love of Jesus and our desire to bring others to Him, and in this way deepen our sense that, "heart speaks to heart". Let us entrust our efforts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the first missionary disciple to open her heart fully to Her Son, and the first to bring Him on mission to others. May she help each of us know more fully what it means to speak, "heart to heart".

Most Rev Mark O'Toole

Archbishop of Cardiff-Menevia

17th January 2026

Memoria of St Anthony, Abbot.