

Tuesday Reflection 7th September 2021

The role of the laity

To ask after the role of the laity is perhaps to ask the wrong question, because it suggests a division or distinction between two groups of people who are all called to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. This mission is to work towards the Kingdom of God, starting here on Earth.

We are all enrolled in this mission through Baptism - through which we become missionaries, concerned not with our own sanctification, but with the salvation of the people of God and all His Creation.

The era of the hierarchical Church with a monarchic papacy which was strong on images of itself as teacher and judge, has been superseded (thanks to Vatican II) by images of itself as an evangeliser, servant, pilgrim people, sacrament and prophet. Unfortunately, old modes of thought persist, and are exacerbated by modern views of faith as an individualistic rather than a corporate pursuit.

Following Christ means belonging to a distinctive community with values that sometimes cut across those of the world.

It is, I think, this notion of community which is central.

The mission of the Church is traditionally achieved by three means, all of them equally relevant today - through prayer, study (particularly of Scripture) and 'good works'. As Christians we are called to work for the Common Good, towards a world where Justice and Peace reign.

It seems to me that none of this is possible without community. Could it be that to be concerned solely for our personal sanctification and that of those near and dear to us is to miss the point and betray our mission?

So, the question of 'what is the role of the laity' is perhaps best answered by saying that the role of all Catholics is to use our talents wisely to establish and engage with community with a common purpose, which is to work as missionaries striving for the Common Good.

There are communities emphasising prayer, groups engaged in Scriptural studies and associations concerned with 'good works' and justice and peace. There is a niche for us in all of these areas; at St Joseph's we are richly endowed with such opportunities. All we are asked to do is grasp them.

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