

Tuesday Reflection 26th May 2020

Today we celebrate the memory of Philip Neri, who, while a layman, undertook much-needed charitable work among the young men of Rome and started a brotherhood to help the sick, poor and pilgrims.

In Jesus' farewell prayer to the Father he says of his disciples "they are in the world". This being "in the world" imposes a special duty and obligation, which Philip Neri fulfilled before he became a priest.

Fast forward to 1964/65: the Second Vatican Council was finalising its documents on the Church, and in these documents there is a line followed on the role of the laity through *Lumen Gentium*, (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), *Gaudium et Spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People).

In *Gaudium et Spes* we read that "the social order requires constant improvement: it must be founded in truth, built on justice and enlivened by love". *Lumen Gentium* declares it to be "the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is quite specific on the role of Christians in the world : "Wherever women and men are to be found who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education ... Wherever there are men and women suffering from misfortune or illness ... exile or imprisonment, Christian charity should search them out, care for them and give them the assistance that will relieve their needs. This obligation is especially binding on the more affluent individuals and nations."

Many of today's Catholics were not even born when these documents were produced, so it is difficult for them to comprehend how revolutionary the pronouncements were in acknowledging that the role of the laity went far beyond the traditional "Pray, pay and obey".

By "engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will" lay Christians are bearing witness to their faith and thus performing important work of evangelisation among those who would probably have no contact with the institutional Church.

"Engaging in temporal affairs and directing them" might be seen by some 'purists' as "politics" and thus to be avoided, but the whole history of Catholic Social Teaching instructs us otherwise.

If we look at what has been happening over the past weeks and months, the Church has been called to be innovative and creative as it adapts rapidly to new situations, and much of the initiative, including in our Parish, has necessarily been taken by lay people, who have had to 'get on with it' at the local level.

Finally, let us not forget that we are called to be *Lumen Gentium* "The Light of the World" and to spread *Gaudium et Spes* - Joy and Hope - and thus to act in the spirit of Philip Neri, who was an enemy of solemnity and conventionality. With him, let us aim for joy rather than respectability.