

## A Further Reflection for Saturday 10 July

I was overjoyed to have heard Archbishop Bernard's pastoral letter read to us at Mass last month.

In it he sets out his vision for the archdiocese and how the churches in the archdiocese should respond. What the archbishop has written is something which has been in my prayers and thoughts for a long time in fact ever since I read Pope Francis's encyclical "The Joy of the Gospel." In it the pope says that the Church following Jesus's command to the disciples before his Ascension should go out and share the Gospel with all people.

We don't know what effect the pandemic with its lockdowns has had and how many will come back to church once all the restrictions are lifted. We may be pleasantly surprised and see a few of those who left the Church ages ago come back and others who had been regular at church before the lockdowns not return. Even before the pandemic I had my concerns for the Church's future because of falling attendances and the parlous state of Christianity in this country. We seem to be pushed to the margins of society by the media and any work we do for Jesus Christ gets no mention. More attention is given to the views of unbelievers and atheists than to Christian ones.

It is not all bad news. There are some evangelistic and pastoral initiatives taking place. A few month's ago Jane and myself were having coffee at Hereford Cathedral and a couple of street pastors came and spoke to us. The street pastor scheme in our cities and large towns are doing wonderful work in helping those in difficulty and have lost a purpose in life. Before the lockdown a number of street pastors were making contact with young people coming out of the nightclubs in the early hours of Saturday and Sunday mornings. The food

banks are a Christian initiative and are mainly staffed by Christians from the local churches. We have a number of Catholics working in the Malvern foodbank. No doubt there are lots of other activities that Christians are involved in showing the love of Jesus.

Going back to the archbishop's pastoral letter: he wants us to be involved in evangelization and social outreach, he wants lay leaders to help provide spiritual and pastoral formation in our churches. He wants our worship and sacramental celebrations to radiate out the life of God more powerfully.

But none of this can happen unless we all take part in some way. We need to pray about the archbishop's vision and use the vision prayers on the cards available to us on the table in the narthex of St Joseph's church each day.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us in this work.

Roger Watson