

Reflection for Saturday 24 October

Each month this year Pope Francis has had an intention for all of us to join him in prayer. This month the intention is: "The Laity's Mission in the Church." He asks us to pray that by virtue of our baptism the laity, especially women, may participate in areas of responsibility in the Church.

October's intention fits in well with the first reading at this morning's Mass from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians in which he writes, "And to some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some pastors, and teachers; so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ." (chapter 4 vs 1 & 12). Some people think that the Church is the pope, the bishops and clergy because they are the professionals, trained to do the work of the Church and are specially called by God. The laity are there to assist in the running of the local church. This is somewhat a wrong view of what the Church is. It's certainly not St Paul's view, nor Pope Francis's. Let's unpack what St Paul is saying in these verses.

An apostle is one who is sent out on a mission. Before Our Lord ascended into heaven he gave authority to the disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations. That was their apostolic mission. St Paul is saying that some people called by God to do that essential work. He does not say that they have to be clergy. We who are not can be apostles. The Church needs men and women who do go out in a particular way and share their faith with others and show the love of Christ. We need people to be proactive in this work. We need people who live close to God in prayer and are able to discern what God is saying and doing in the various events in the world and in their local area and then to speak out. This is the job of the prophet. The evangelist is the one who can communicate the Christian message of God's love and the teaching of Jesus of those who know nothing or very little of him. The Church needs pastors to care for people who would benefit from God's love and concern in what they are going through in their lives. The SVP does that work. There is a teaching ministry in the Church in the form of catechists. But the Church needs more people to join SVP and train as catechists so that Christ can be seen and known through his loving care and his teaching on how we should live.

The Church is a unity of baptized people called and doing vital work in proclaiming and living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We don't have to be deacons, priests and religious to do that work. They have their essential ministry. God calls all of us whoever we are. We all have a ministry, a service by virtue of our baptism to live and work for him. The Church is all of us. We are all saints in that respect. We do need more deacons and priests to lead us in those ministries.

Is God calling you?

Roger Watson