



A YEAR FOR MISSION 2017

What is a Parish?

PART TWO OF FOUR PARISH REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

QUOTATIONS



The Lord God said to Abram, “Go... I will make of you a great nation... in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (*Genesis 12:1-3*).

The Lord God said to Moses, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt... I will be with you” (*Exodus 3:10-12*).

Jesus said to the Apostles, “Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Matthew 28:18-19*).

The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of his own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world... to raise human beings to a participation of the divine life. At the end of time all the just... will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church (*Lumen Gentium 2*).

A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop (2179).



We have seen that the heart of the life of a parish is the Eucharist, the Sunday celebration of the Mass. Let us see now why being members of a community, the Church, is essential to being a Christian.

When God spoke to Abraham and Moses, he had in mind *a great nation* whom he would call into being from *all the families of the earth*. They would be his people, called to serve him in a life of holiness and truth. As the **Second Vatican Council** reminded us, this loving plan was born in the Father's heart. When Jesus spoke to the Apostles, he had this same people in mind: called out from *all nations*, they were to be his disciples *in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*.

Whenever God chooses an individual, it is always with a view to a community; ultimately, it is with *us* in mind. His promise is always the same: *I will be with you. It is I who will do this*. God loves each person individually; yet he calls us to be members of a community, for he calls us to a *participation of the divine life*, and for God, who is Trinity, to exist is to be in communion.

Knowing that we are *'gathered together'* by God as his people, it is therefore crucial for our life in the family of the Church at every level, be it in a **Parish**, a **Diocese**, or the **Universal Church**. This is also what the *Catechism* tells us in the definition we have already begun to consider: we learn that a parish is *a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within the particular Church*. As Christians, we need to belong to a community.

Christ himself calls the parish into existence; it exists so that the life of each Christian may flourish and be all that it should be, by the grace of God. It is vital that every parish community be open to the wider community to which it belongs. For just as we cannot live a fruitful Christian life on our own, so our parish will only be fully and fruitfully Catholic if we are conscious of belonging to both the wider community of the **Diocese of Shrewsbury** and the **Universal Church**.



The pastoral care of a parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop. The Bishop designates a parish priest (pastor) for each parish, to be responsible for the pastoral care of that community. Representing Christ, the one Head and Good Shepherd of all, as priest-pastor he cares for the people entrusted to him. This the priest does by preaching the Gospel and explaining the Catholic faith; celebrating the Sacraments, above all the Holy Eucharist; and by encouraging all the members of the parish in their Christian life and mission.

As no one can be fully Christian alone, and no parish can be truly Christian in isolation, so no priest can fully exercise his priesthood on his own. He, together with the other members of the clergy, works *with and under the authority of the diocesan bishop* who is himself in communion with his fellow bishops throughout the world, with and under the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.

As Successor of Peter, the Holy Father's mission is to guarantee the visible unity of the Church on earth; with him, the bishops of the whole Church manifest her rich diversity. The service of the People of God is apostolically fruitful (meaning grace-filled) when all these various ministers work together in communion, each exercising his respective responsibility.

The source of our communion is the one, true Eucharist, celebrated according to the mind of the Church throughout time and space. Through the Eucharist, every parish is in communion with the other parishes of the Diocese and with the Universal Church.

This is the **MYSTERY OF COMMUNION**, which is the precious gift of God to us all. It is the reason both Pope Francis and Bishop Mark are prayed for - by name - in every Eucharistic Prayer. So, too, is the whole College of Bishops, as a reminder that, though **our parish** be small or remote, it is a community which is one with the local **Diocesan Church** and the **Universal Church**.

“*The whole Church has been seen as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

St Cyprian (c200-258 AD) Bishop of Carthage, North Africa



The one Church exists simultaneously as

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

On earth, in heaven and in purgatory

A DIOCESAN CHURCH

In a local environment

A PARISH CHURCH

“In the homes of her members”

(Pope Francis)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 830 –35

DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIONS



How are we called together as the Church?



How do we, as a parish, live our communion with the local Church of the Diocese and with the Universal Church?



How are we as a parish recognizably part of the local Church of Shrewsbury and the Universal Church?

In a time of silence, take a moment to ponder all of these things, and then make a personal decision:



What can I do, personally, to live what I have discovered in these reflections?



What can we do together as members of a parish to live this vision more deeply?

*Pray together the prayer **Our Mission Together.***