

THE MINISTRY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN: *holiness and the Kingdom of Heaven*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 897-913)

Introduction

Put briefly, the ministry of each Christian, man, woman or child and admitting of no exception whatsoever, is to preach the Gospel to all nations, and teach peoples to observe the commandments given to us by Christ - contained in the Old as well as the New Testament, and in the living teaching of Christ - the solemn teaching of the Catholic Church. There is no minimum age to this mission, nor is there an age limit: from the moment of Baptism until the moment of death, our ministry is one of proclaiming the Gospel, irrespective of age, health, culture, natural talent, theological training or lack of it.

If this sounds daunting and perhaps even exaggerated, then the message has got through! God admits of no grounds for disqualification: once commissioned as a public witness to the life, teaching and presence of Jesus Christ, no circumstance releases us from this mission. When this is recognised, we have the supreme choice: do we regard this fundamental truth as slavery to the Church, or as our greatest guarantee of God's absolute refusal to stop loving us? In other words, we can never be too young to be used by God to save the world, nor can we be too old to be of use, nor too ill. Even if we are totally lacking in theological formation, we are not useless to God for his plan of salvation. We can not disqualify ourselves on the grounds that we know little Sacred Scripture, that we are only little people with no special talent, that we can't express our beliefs and faith very well or that there are so many other people who would be much better at it than we would be. The inescapable fact of Revelation in Christ is that God chooses to use every member of his Body (the Church) as the instrumental means of saving creation. Those more talented than us? They will be used too - so we mere mortals are not superseded by them.

In effect, no obstacle we can think of is sufficiently large to be insurmountable to God: he always has a role for us, no matter how small or unworthy we feel. Throughout literally every moment of our Christian lives he is choosing deliberately to involve us directly in his plan to save his world.

Nothing we can do will persuade God to give up on us as missionaries of the Gospel. Even if we have no faith in ourselves, God is supremely faithful, and has the highest confidence in our ability to proclaim and to bring about the power of his salvation - because in all of this, it is not us who are at work, but Christ. And even the newly baptised infant has his or her part to play from the moment of Baptism in allowing Christ to save the world through him or her.

A. One Spirit pursuing a single goal in different ways

This needs to be unpacked a little. While it doesn't sound very revolutionary, and may even appear to be obvious, the effects of this belief and its real meaning are far-reaching, and need to be carefully looked at.

1: A Single Goal

The whole Church & every member of it, inherits the commission given by Christ to the apostles to preach salvation - in other words, to preach Christ. The idea has become prevalent within all Christian communities, not just the Catholic Church, that this commission is only received by the clergy. This is possibly because we have too narrow an understanding of 'preach': we tend to think of the homily at Mass as the only form of preaching, and since this *is* restricted to those who are licensed to teach the faith by the Church in her own acts of public worship (i.e., to those ordained into Holy Orders), we think that only the Clergy have the obligation to preach the Good News. This has never been the teaching of the Church, either in its formal statements of doctrine or in its informal, day-by-day instruction. The Church has always stressed with the greatest vigour that ALL of the baptised receive the commission and therefore the *obligation* to proclaim Christ publicly in the means best suited to their calling by God and their status in the world. It was Pope Pius XII who coined the phrase "We are the Church" - all of the baptised, not just the ordained - as far back as the 1950s. What is said of the Church therefore applies to all of us, not just bishops, priests and deacons - laity especially, since they are numerically stronger than the clergy:

- *"Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men." C.C.C. 849, quoting the Second Vatican Council's document Ad Gentes, para 1.*

All of the Church receives this mandate, laity included. This is precisely why we are baptised - to prepare us to go and teach all the nations, and in addition to this, the purpose of Confirmation is to complete the grace of Baptism so that we are ready as adult witnesses to give the testimony of our lives to the Gospel. All who have received these sacraments are called to be holy and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. (The notes on these two sessions, which you have already, may be a useful reminder). All the baptised and confirmed are called to respond to the grace of faith they have received, and this is manifested in a new and deeper love of God himself: committed

Christians are drawn to the mission of the Church in public witness of their faith because of the intense love they develop for God:

- *"It is from God's love for all men that the Church in every age receives both the **obligation** and the **vigour** of her missionary dynamism". C.C.C. 851*

The **obligation**: the faith tells us that God's relationship with his creation is one of love and forgiveness: this **MUST** be relayed. God's people have the right to hear that their creator is benevolent; that he offers them restoration of the joy they have lost, of meaning to their lives on earth and the complete fulfilment of life in the world to come. The fact that what we have received is Good News obliges us to relate it.

The **vigour**, or strength: God's love does not simply oblige us to preach - it is also the power through which we do preach. That love, poured personally into our souls (Rom. 5:5), is the fire that allows us to modify our actions according to the Law of God, which is love of our neighbour, so that our witness to the love of God is found not merely in what we say, but more powerful in our actions.

Because we love God, we desire the salvation of the world that he loves, and therefore are impelled by that love to promote that salvation - man, woman, child, monk, religious sister, priest all alike. As God desires the salvation of all, the Church, Christ's bride, offers herself to achieve that goal both as a demonstration to God of her love for her husband, Christ, and out of genuine love for the world. Each baptised Christian is therefore impelled by the very meaning of their own baptism, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments and by their membership of the Body of the Church, whose character is missionary, to dedicate themselves without reservation to the active and deliberate proclamation of Christ through the way they live their lives. The way we act proclaims loudly the nature of the beliefs we truly hold, and the most profound preaching of the Gospel is more practical than vocal: in the words of St. Francis of Assisi - *"Wherever you go, proclaim the Gospel, and if absolutely necessary, use words."*

- *"Because of the one dignity flowing from Baptism, each member of the lay faithful, together with ordained ministers & men and women religious, shares a responsibility for the Church's mission." (Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (1987), para. 15)*
- *"The Lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel." (Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 33)*
- C.C.C. 850-851

2: Pursued in different ways

St. Paul tackles this issue head-on in his first letter to the Corinthians. Using the image of a human body, he emphasises with tremendous force that the mission of the Church to preach and effect salvation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is accomplished by the members of the Church in different ways. What he is anxious to

avoid is the notion that members of the Church are like clones, each with identical functions who are therefore interchangeable. In other words, no particular ministry within the Church is entrusted to any individual - all ministries are capable of being performed by any of the members, and it's just that in order to avoid chaos, the Spirit calls certain individuals to perform them. To St. Paul, this idea is abhorrent and to us, who regard this letter of his as written by God through St. Paul, the notion is explicitly contrary to the teaching of Christ himself. We are not created as interchangeable units but as unique and unrepeatable manifestations of the love of God: no one can completely take your place, because no one else is the extraordinary and one-off gift that you are. For this reason, there are tasks and ministries within and outside the Church that are specifically asked of us as individuals, for which we were made and for the fulfilment of which we were given the gifts we rejoice in.

Thus, according to the providence of God, the various gifts and abilities which are necessary for the flourishing of the Church and which the Church will need to accomplish her mission to spread the Gospel are all provided in sufficient quantity within the whole Church – but are not given to each person. The Church, for instance, needs mothers and fathers who are committed to bringing up their children with a love of God and of their neighbours - but that does not mean that all Christians are called to be parents. The Church needs preachers capable of proclaiming the Gospel with vigour and clarity; she needs men and women who are efficient administrators, who are good at organising people, who can recognise talent and get the best out of people; she needs wise leaders, she needs people to renew in her members the seven effective signs of the New Covenant (i.e., the three-fold ordained ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, to administer the seven mysterious sacraments); she needs talented instructors (catechists), she needs people who are good with money and understand the world of finance, she needs members who are able to present her teaching in the field of lawmaking, political representation and in courts of justice; she needs men and women trained in theology and the ways of prayer and so on. Without these gifts, the Church will be capable of only futile gestures in the completion of her God-given mission: and since we believe that God never deals in futile gestures, we are led to the inescapable conclusion that he always has, does in our own day and will always continue to provide within his Church those gifts which are necessary for the effective proclamation of the Gospel.

To St. Paul, the existence of different ministries within the Church confirms the work of the Holy Spirit, for only God could forge out of such distribution of talent a single functioning body, where the talents necessary for the health of the whole are found not in each member but in specific individuals. In order for the body to remain healthy, these talents must be offered for the good of the whole, therefore, rather than retained for the good of the individual – hence the Church's concept of ministry, in whatever field, as service of the **whole**.

- *"Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink." (1 Cor. 12:12-13).*

The health of the whole body relies on the individual parts performing their proper function within the whole body, and resisting the desire to become another part of the

body - a part they might like to be but for which they do not have the necessary attributes:

- *"Nor is the body to be identified with any one of its parts. If the foot were to say, 'I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body', would that mean that it stopped being part of the body? If the ear were to say, 'I am not an eye, and so I do not belong to the body', would that mean it was not a part of the body? If your whole body was just one eye, how would you hear anything? If it was just one ear, how would you smell anything?" (1 Cor. 12:14-17)*

It is tempting for us to look at the role or ministry of another in the Church and feel that we should be doing the same. This is the cause of a great deal of friction within a parish community as people become first jealous of another's preferment and then envious. Taken to its logical conclusion, we arrive at the idea that it is unfair and discriminatory if I am not permitted to carry out the ministry that is given to someone else. This is to forget the plan that God has for his Church - nowhere does God ever say or even intimate that he entrusts the same ministry to each and every member of his family. Nowhere does God promise that he is an equal opportunities employer. On the contrary, he does say that through the Holy Spirit he calls different people to perform different tasks within the Church.

- *"Instead of that, God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose. If all the parts were the same, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you', nor can the head say to the feet, 'I do not need you'." (1 Cor. 12:17-21)*

The analogy is very punchy here. Today, there are many people within the Church who leave the Catholic Church because they are unable to receive the ministry they want. The most celebrated are those who campaign for women priests. Their thinking is exactly as St. Paul describes it - they argue that since they do not have the ministry they want they will no longer be a part of the body they have joined. This is as confused as a hand wanting so much to be a foot that when it realises that it is not a foot it decides to leave the body and find another body where it will be accepted as a foot.

The terrible mistake being made here is to confuse the means and the end. The end (or purpose) for all these ministries is NOT the same as the means. The means is ME - I am the one who is given these gifts. BUT the end is not me - the end is the up building of the Church and the salvation of God's people. Thus, God may need my gifts to be sacrificed for the salvation of the world (look at the many martyrs for whom this has been true). God gives me my ministry within the Church not primarily for my advancement or as a sign of favour or for my own benefit but for the wider purpose he has in mind - **SALVATION**. By God's design, we are obliged to offer our gifts to the Church in the form of various ministries so as to remain healthy ourselves, and so as to ensure the health of the whole Church, the Body. While there are higher and lower functions to be performed within the body, more menial as well as more prominent tasks, all are critical and therefore none less important than the others:

- *"It is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones; and it is the least honourable parts of the body that we*

clothe with the greatest care ... God has arranged the body so that the more dignity is given to the parts which are without it, and so that there may not be disagreements inside the body, but that each part may be equally concerned for all the others." (1 Cor. 12:22, 24-25)

Finally he draws his conclusion: the different gifts given to different members of the Church denote the different tasks they are invited to undertake for the good of the Church's mission in which they are all equally responsible: the fact that one is not given the ministry of another does not give him or her less honour, only a different role, all within the single body and all ordered towards the health of the whole, not simply the individual part:

- *"Now together you are Christ's body; **but each of you is a different part of it.** In the Church, God has given the first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers; after them miracles, and after them the gift of healing; helpers, good leaders, those with many languages. Are all of them apostles, or all of the prophets, or all of them teachers? Do they all have the gift of miracles, or all have the gift of healing? Do all speak strange languages, and all interpret them?" (1 Cor. 12:27-30).*

In summary: the single goal of the Church (to proclaim and effect salvation through Christ, the Good News) is accomplished by the Holy Spirit raising up within the Church the kaleidoscope of ministries necessary for the whole Body of the Church to work as a single unit, adequate to the task asked of her.

3: By One Spirit.

Behind the myriad tasks and ministries of the Church, the varied forms of service which we offer to our Parish community - prominent or hidden; elevating or menial; liturgical, administrative, catechetical, ecumenical or whatever - there is a binding force behind them which ensures that different ways of serving the Church do not lead her into division. The same Holy Spirit who is the binding love between Father and Son, the Spirit who unites us with the Son through the sacraments, and the same Spirit whose whole activity whether within the Godhead itself or among human beings is to draw many into a single harmonious body - this Holy Spirit is the inspiration, the originating force and the perpetuating power behind every authentic act of service. No ministry within the Church is possible without the Holy Spirit, no matter how mundane the service appears. When the Holy Father exercises the Infallibility of Christ in defining dogma which is binding on all the faithful because it pertains to the essential heart of the teaching of Christ - such as the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Lady (1854), it is God the Holy Spirit at work in a human being who makes this possible. In the same way, when a team of flower arrangers set to work to decorate the Church in preparation for the Sunday Mass, or when a Parish Council determines to set in motion the plans for a parish fete or the purchase of a new property for the Church, then it is the same Holy Spirit who is behind the work, giving inspiration and strength to the human authors, working in ordinary members of the Body of Christ no less divinely than when he guides the Pope in the authentic teaching of the Faith.

While this seems straightforward and perhaps even obvious, the consequences of this basic teaching of Sacred Scripture may take us a little by surprise. If the same Holy Spirit is behind the authentic work of every ministry within the Church, then every act of service is complementary to every other act. To put it another way, there is no essential conflict between the different ministries operative within the Church:

- despite appearances, there is no contradiction between working for ecumenism and instructing those wishing to enter the Catholic Church;
- nor does the God-given gift of leadership and authority within the Church (given to the college of bishops and exercised in the parishes by priests) undermine or conflict with a true and deep collaboration between clergy and people;
- nor indeed does God's desire to provide ministerial priests after Our Lord's heart detract from the notion that in some way, his whole people are priestly in their collective nature.

We need to be very careful not to set one against the other as if they are in competition or as if it is prejudicial that each of us cannot choose whatever ministry we wish. Today, many people like to pit the Church's ministries against each other as though they were contradictory - ordained versus lay, married versus celibate, mother versus father, man versus woman etc. This is easy to do but very misguided. For some, the existence of celibate clergy is seen as evidence that the Church is anti-marriage, or that having ordained clergy is anti-laity, or that ministries for men is anti-women.

This way of thinking comes from our culture's attempts to pursue equality in society. We have a simplistic idea of equality that is suspicious of any differentiation: if two people have different responsibilities, we immediately look to see which has the "better" job or higher standing. We see equality as being attained only when people have identical opportunities and ministries. If one group of people are barred from a particular role in society, it is seen as unjust and so is contested in court: but while we should agree that on many occasions this springs from prejudice within our culture, this is not always so. For instance, 400 years ago and up until 1829 there was a group of English men and women who were banned from taking any office in the government, civil service, the medical profession, the universities, taking a commission in the army, becoming a lawyer or teacher all irrespective of ability, loyalty or potential - the banned men and women were Catholics. Similarly, immigrants have found jobs banned to them on the grounds of prejudice and many other situations have arisen. These are cases where people are arbitrarily forbidden to take up roles that they have the potential to fulfil. In these cases, equality is found only when all those who could do the work are given the opportunity to show that they can. HOWEVER, there are cases where those who apply are actually unable to fulfil the work they wish to carry out: if a man applies to the court for a discrimination ruling on the grounds that he is being unfairly forbidden to be a mother we would say that he is not being treated unfairly. He could claim that he is not being treated equally with women until he can do all that they can do (including motherhood) - but this is not inequality. There are some things which men are not able to do - and this is not discrimination but the consequence of the truth that God calls us to do different

things. Our culture has a quick fix for the cry 'discrimination' - let everyone be equally able to do exactly the same things, let no one be unable to do something that another person can do. Thus, if a married man and woman have the legal status of a family, then the same legal status must be given to a gay couple. Thus, if a man and woman can adopt a child and become their legal parents, so a gay couple must be allowed to become the legal parents of a child they wish to adopt. This is the consequence of thinking that the only genuine equality is the one where we are all identical.

But, as you can see, this does not work. As a man I should be able to sue God for the fact that I am not a woman. Perhaps I can claim that it is discrimination that since I am white-skinned, I find the heat more difficult to cope with - or that since I was born to parents who weren't millionaires I was deprived of the holidays I ought to have had when I was a child. This shows the nonsense of regarding equality as meaning nothing less than having identical opportunities. The Church has always defended the belief that we are equal *in dignity* but that clearly we are NOT equal in ability, potential, intellect, maturity, understanding, common sense, height, wealth, ministry etc. God calls us to different ministries precisely *because* we are not identical, and thank God we are not because it would mean that there would be no significant differences between us, which would make for a shudderingly boring species! We are different in ability and therefore in ministry and this is what makes us mutually complimentary: what I can not do, I find in another who can. We are led to co-operate and to work together in order to achieve what we have set our sights on.

The one Spirit does not give the *fullness* of *every* ministry to each member of the Church: to a parish sister is not given the ministry of fatherhood or motherhood; a priest is not given the opportunity of active political involvement, of work in the secular world or, ordinarily, of parenthood; a catechist may have the ministry of teaching but not of administration etc. The fact that one member of the Church is not given the same ministry as another does not detract from or diminish in any way the importance of either, nor is either demeaned by the different tasks asked of them - nor is it unfair that some ministries within the Church are not open to some people but open to others. This is part of the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit: out of a diversity of gifts, distributed throughout the People of God, the Holy Spirit welds a single unit - the Body of Christ:

- *"There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom given him by the Spirit; another may have the gift of instruction given him by the same Spirit; and another the gift of faith given by the same Spirit; another the gift of healing through this one Spirit; one, the power of miracles; another, prophesy; another the gift of recognising spirits; another the gift of tongues and another the ability to interpret them. **All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as He chooses.**" 1 (Cor. 12:4-11).*

Since all these gifts come from the same source, the Holy Spirit, and are designed to fulfil the same goal, the salvation of the whole of creation, there can be no conflict

between them. If there were, it would mean that God was divided against Himself - and therefore must fall (Mt. 12:25, Mk. 3:24-25, Lk. 11:17). All these various charisms of the Holy Spirit complement each other and help to build up both the Church as a whole and the individual members of it. To say anything else is to suggest that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to the Church that are mutually contradictory and cannot exist side by side. You may hear people suggest that the reason why vocations to the priesthood are on the decline in the West is because the Holy Spirit is reducing the number of priests so as to allow the vocation of the laity to be developed. This sounds attractive and convincing but it is meaningless: it means that the God-given vocation to the laity can only thrive in the absence of the God-given vocation to the priesthood. It means that God is divided against himself, providing two different gifts, which cannot thrive together, but only in the absence of the other. If you ever hear this comment from those who think they know why there are fewer vocations in the West, I suggest you ask them why they think these vocations can not grow alongside each other but only at the expense of the other - especially when the very part of the world which is seeing an explosion of priestly vocations is *the same place* where the laity have exercised and continue to exercise a very involved place in the life of the church (I am speaking of Africa, India, China).

In summary - while the Holy Spirit entrusts different gifts to us, the overall mission of the Church is the goal of each and every one of these gifts. No matter what the nature or dignity of the spiritual gifts we have been entrusted with, God desires our collaboration with him in saving the world. In effect, each gift is given for the advantage not of the recipient but for the salvation of everyone but the recipient. My gifts will be used by God to help save you, not myself - *my* salvation will be brought about by God using the gifts he has given to *you*. For this reason, the Church has always taught the public destination of all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the social dimension of salvation. Christ does not give salvation to me individually - he gives it through me to you, and I receive it *through your ministry*. This being the case, Christ can and does entrust to every member of the Church the ministry and responsibility of evangelisation - the privilege and duty before God to promote the fullness of the authentic faith handed to us by Christ in the Sacred Scriptures and in the living teaching of the Catholic Church - only through the gift of different ministries.

- There is no conflict between the ordained ministry in the Church (bishops, priests and deacons) and the ministry of the laity. The Church needs both, and each serve for the welfare of the other. Thus it does not diminish the importance of the lay vocation to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, nor does this mean we are over-clerical - any more than we could say that if priests prayed for a growth in the number of holy and prayerful laity, it would mean that they did not see the purpose of priests!
- Every Christian - lay or ordained, single or married - is called individually and by name, by Jesus Christ himself, to grow deeper in holiness, to pray for the salvation of the world, to live in accordance with his commandments, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth through proclaiming the faith and evangelising those who have not heard the fullness of the Truth, to become an example of the way God loves (in accordance with their state of life - single, married, ordained, employed retired etc.), to develop a strong and

wholehearted love of the Father through Christ in the Spirit, and to love one another no less than God loves us. This is the mission of all Christ's faithful.

B. Ministry within the Church - Mission outside the Church

1: The Service of the Christian to the Church

Each member of the Church is bound in love to offer him/herself in service to the Church. The model of Christian ministry within the Church is that of Christ himself who came *"not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mt. 20:28, Mk. 10:45). In action, this can be seen in the whole of Christ's life - that of the Suffering Servant as prophesied by Isaiah (*ch. 42, 49, 50 & especially 52-53*) - in which he gave his time, energy and compassion to healing his people, instructing them in the path of holiness and leading them since they were *"harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Mt. 9:36, Mk. 6:34). Service does not mean being a door-mat: Christianity in the manner of Christ our Head and Bridegroom does not insist on our being exploited, and indeed we should (for the sake of justice and compassion) resist the exploitation of all peoples. Equally, it does not mean seeking to dominate and control that part of the Church in which we live. It is not about the single-minded and undeterrable pursuit of what I think the teaching of the Church ought to be (as you find with the more extreme pressure groups within the Church, such as Catholics for a Free Choice who campaign for the legalisation of homosexuality, abortion and all sorts). The more militant and belligerent groups within the Church, which have a single platform and are concerned about forcing through change where they see fit have forgotten that their baptism calls them to serve the Church, not batter it into exhausted submission to their own agendas.

Christian service demands that we offer to the Church with a glad heart the fullness of our God-given abilities for the building-up of the People of God. We do this for the good that it brings to our brothers and sisters and not for any personal feeling of satisfaction, since this sort of feeling will not always accompany our work for the community, and if it is the principle reason why we serve each other (for the buzz it gives us) then we will soon abandon it when the feelings wear off but the work still remains to be done! The service we offer to the Church is both private and public:

A. Private

All Christian service is grounded in prayer: the search of the individual for the presence of God within them and the desire for closer unity with him. Prayer leads them to understand that God is not exclusively to be found within. Prayer leads the Christian to recognise that ultimately God is transcendent - he is above all things, greater than all things, fills all things but is infinitely *beyond* all things. The first requirement of the Christian life is to grow in holiness personally, and this begins from the individual in word and action - that is, in prayer and in conforming the actions of our lives to the teaching of the Gospel.

- *"All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.' This charge is not a simple moral exhortation but an undeniable requirement." (Pope John Paul II, Christifideles Laici, para. 16, quoting Lumen Gentium, the document of Vatican II on the Church, para 40).*

B. Public

All the faithful of the Church are called to give of themselves generously towards the community of the Church they live in. We are called to build up the unity of the Church by offering to the parish the gifts we have which will confirm the communion that exists between its members. In practice, this means working alongside (and not in competition with) other members of the parish and under the guidance of the parish priest, who represents the bishop as the head of the local Church in union with the Holy Father. We must offer what we can to deepen the bonds of friendship, cooperation and mutual reliance in our area, confirming and supporting the efforts of the parish to give single-minded witness to the life of Faith. Pope Paul VI taught that the parish is there to:

- *"create the basic community of the Christian people; to initiate and gather the people in the accustomed expression of liturgical life; to conserve and renew the faith in the people of today; to serve as the school for teaching the salvific message of Christ; to put solidarity in practice and work the humble charity of good and brotherly works." (Discourse to the Roman Clergy, June 24 1963)*

Put simply, we must do all we can to contribute to the Christ-centeredness of our parish, and to offer our gifts to the community, through its head, the parish priest, so as to build up the other members. Our model for such ministry is, of course, Christ's own - the washing of feet (*"If I do not wash you, you can have no part of Me", Jn. 13:8*) and the parable of the Last Judgement (*"I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me ... in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you neglected to do it to me."* Mt. 25:40, 46).

2: The Service of the Christian from within the Church to the World

The Church was founded for the salvation of the world, not simply for the salvation of its own members, hence the need for the Church to proclaim Christ to the whole world. The Church's first and primary goal, therefore, is to be the living Body of Christ - the community of believers who model their lives and teaching so closely on that of Christ that it is evident to those outside it that Christ lives through them, and that the force of their witness is drawn directly from him (Jn. 21:23(?)). Pope John Paul II has drawn out, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, many of the ways in which the lay members of the Church are called upon to offer powerful witness to the life of Christ within them. Without such public witness we are, in the words of St. Paul *"a gong booming, or a cymbal clashing"* (1 Cor. 13:1), and St. James adds, *"You must do what the word tells you, and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves."* (James 1:22) The lay Christian is called by the Gospel to sanctify the

world by living out the Christian values of the Gospel - that means promoting the common good of all, by challenging those structures of culture and society which challenge or contradict the teaching of Christ, by insisting on justice in the market-place, by pressing for legislation which protects the family and the right to life, by working for peace, by defending the poorest from exploitation, by working to eliminate the causes of poverty and famine etc.

It is the meaning of the Gospel and the constant teaching of the Church that the building up of the Church and the public witness of the Church in the world are the means God has designed for our participation in Christ's work of saving the world. As Christian people in the Catholic Church, our ministerial agenda is given to us by God. God also gives the strength to carry it out. We are simply asked to give our effort, with a willing heart and not for the personal benefit.