

# "Christ's Mission; the Church's Mission": A homily in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

***Preached at St Dominic's Roman Catholic Church, Waddon, on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Sunday of the Word of God) 23rd January 2022 by Revd. Canon Andrew Bishop (Priest-in-Charge, Croydon Minster).***

May I begin by thanking Fr Simplicio for his kind invitation to me to come to preach this morning. I bring the greetings of the Anglican Christians of the parish of Croydon, both St John the Baptist, also known as Croydon Minster, and St George's, Waddon, where my colleague Fr David has pastoral responsibility.

This is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and I hope that Fr Simplicio's invitation, and my presence, says something powerfully about the desire for the followers of Jesus to be one, as Christ and the Father are one.

And you are also most welcome to Croydon Minster for Choral Evensong at 6.30pm this evening when our preacher is Monsignor Matthew Dickens, Vicar General for the Archdiocese of Southwark. Another sign of our desire to listen to one another as fellow Christians.

And here's a little secret: Fr Simplicio, Fr David and I have a WhatsApp group that we call 'Shepherds in Waddon'. That title acknowledges our pastoral responsibility as shepherds of God's people in this locality, albeit in different churches and shared with our Bishops. I hope we are setting a wider example of commitment to Christian Unity in conversation, fraternity and in prayer.

Pope St John Paul II was a passionate and, for me as an Anglican, inspiring advocate of the unity of the Church, dedicating his Encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, to the topic in 1995. The Latin phrase, *Ut Unum Sint*, means 'may they all be one' and that is Jesus' prayer found in St John's Gospel (John 17.21).

'May they all be one' and he continues 'that the world may believe that you have sent me'.

In that prayer Jesus Christ invites us into the mission of the Father and the Son, who in the communion of the Holy Spirit, are totally one.

Today's gospel reading tells us for what Jesus was sent and the nature of his mission. He is the one referred to in Isaiah's scroll: anointed 'to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour' (Luke 4.18-19).

This is the *Missio Christi*, the mission of Christ, a mission that becomes ours in our baptism. We too are anointed, as prophets, priests and kings: this is our task too.

Jesus Christ fulfils this mission in *who he is*; we fulfil his mission in who we are, God's pilgrim people, the Church.

All that we do as Christians is seek to join the mission of Christ in the world as his Body. St Paul reflects deeply on that reality in his first letter to the Corinthians, our second reading (1 Corinthians 12.12-30). We are a diverse, yet connected, body in gifts and roles. Our connection, and God willing, unity is in his Body. So we receive Christ's Body at Mass to become more truly his Body, the Church.

When we speak of 'our mission' that's only in the sense that we embrace *Christ's* mission, to make it our own. 'Our mission' is not generated by us, but is the task entrusted to us as Christ's disciples, led by the successors to the apostles.

And that is where the deepest mission of God is to reveal his unity to the world, the unity of God the Holy Trinity, and the unity of you and me, his followers.

God reveals his presence in the world, in the cosmos, in creation, without our help. What we can do is make God's life visible in our lives, in our bodies, in all that we think and speak and do.

That means there are concrete acts of reflecting God's mission in the world. The corporal Acts of Mercy echo Jesus mission declared in the Synagogue of Nazareth: we can feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, comfort the imprisoned, visit the sick, bury and honour the dead. Basically all those concrete, embodied, acts of mercy are things we can do together now. We don't need to wait for agreement on Holy Orders, sacraments and authority to do that.

What a witness to God's mission that would be if this church together with St George's, Waddon, and Croydon Minster were to work together in the corporal acts of mercy: a challenge and opportunity for us all. Let's do together things we are not obliged to do apart.

You know, sixty years ago the parish priest of this church would never have invited the Vicar the Anglican parish church to preach at mass here. And the Vicar of the Anglican parish church would never have accepted the invitation.

Over time we are growing in responding to Jesus's prayer *Ut Unum Sint*, 'may they all be one , just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17.21)