**HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST,**

**KING OF THE UNIVERSE**

**GO, THEREFORE, MAKE DISCIPLES …**

As some of you will know, I studied for the priesthood at the Beda College in Rome. Most Sundays we attended Mass in the college chapel. But every now and then we were given what was called a “Liturgy-free” Sunday. Now, that didn't mean that we weren’t expected to go to Mass! It would be a rather odd seminary that didn't expect its seminarians to go to Mass on Sunday. But what it did mean was that, if we so wished, we could attend Mass in one of the churches of Rome.

So, on these days I would often attend Mass at the church of Santa Susanna in the heart of Rome. For those of you who know Rome, this is an ancient church in the city centre, not far from Termini station, and it happened at that time to be the church where the American community in Rome worshipped. And so, as my Italian wasn’t all it should have been, it was a great place for me to attend Mass in English. More importantly, the priests there had a reputation for being great preachers; and I remember being there at Mass on *this* day, the Solemnity of Christ the King, in *this* year - Year A - and hearing *this* gospel of the sheep and the goats.

The preacher that day had an interesting take on today’s gospel. He asked us whom did we imagine the sheep and the goats to be. He suggested that most people might make the assumption that the sheep were the followers of Jesus and the goats ... well, they were not. But his contention was that the parable couldn't be so easily explained. He said that the evidence was in the parable itself: for the sheep, those on the right, responded to the king; "*When did we see you hungry and give you something to eat*..."? They didn’t seem to know that they were doing those things for and ultimately to the king, any more than those on the king’s left-hand thought they hadn't done them for and to the king.

The preacher went on to make the point that this gospel concerns the minimum required of every human being: to act with love and compassion towards others in need. But for us, who are indeed the followers of Jesus, just doing good deeds is not enough. Yes, the Corporal Works of Mercy are important and must be done, but **more** is asked of you, of me, and of all who bear the name Christian.

A Church which only does acts of kindness and charity would end up being a kind of charitable NGO – a Non-Governmental Organisation. This is something that Pope Francis has frequently spoken about. On the day after he was elected Pope, while celebrating Mass with the Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, he said this: *"If we do not confess to Christ, what would we be? We would end up a compassionate NGO. What would happen would be like when children make sandcastles and then it all falls down."* In other words, a Church which doesn’t have the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ as the foundation of its life and purpose will be swept away like grains of sand.

This is a theme to which Pope Francis has returned again and again. On one occasion he beautifully compared to the Church to Mary when she visited her cousin Elizabeth:

*She [Mary] brought not only material help ... But she also brought Jesus, who was already alive in her womb. Bringing Jesus into that house meant bringing joy, the fullness of joy ... in this, the Church is like Mary. The Church is not a shop, she is not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO. The Church is sent to bring Christ and his gospel to all.*

***‘The Church is sent to bring Christ and his gospel to all.’***

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe. What does that mean? Jesus is the Universal King, he’s not the king only of Christians, he is the king of all creation, and this is good news that we cannot ignore and which we are commanded to share joyfully with everyone. That's why, this weekend, I have written a letter to all parishioners. The letter is entitled "*Go, therefore, make disciples...*” These are words from the Great Commission given by Jesus at the end of his earthly mission: *Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.*

The grammatical hinge of the sentence is ***make disciples*** – in the original Greek it is one word *matheteusate.*  This is the principal or finite verb of the sentence and it’s in the imperative mode – essentially, it is a command! The *going*, the *baptising*, and the *teaching* are all participles, which depend upon the finite verb: *make disciples.*

Today we’ve largely forgotten this truth: that our purpose as a Church is to be about making disciples. We’re good at the going, the baptizing and the teaching. The Church has a long tradition of taking the Gospel to the ends of the world – we’re great a baptizing - if it moves we’ll pretty much baptize it! We’re excellent at teaching - catechesis in the Catholic Church is second to none. But what we’re not good at is helping people to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. I know that “having a personal encounter with Jesus Christ” is not perhaps the usual way for us of Catholics to speak about our faith; but what could be more important for a Christian than to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and be in a living relationship with him?

When we baptise and give the other sacraments, and when we teach, without there being a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, then as someone once said: "*It's like taking seeds and planting them in concrete*" – nothing will grow!

We've forgotten that we are called to make disciples - ‘**The Church is sent to bring Christ and his gospel to all’ -** and in order to do that we have to become missionary disciples ourselves. What is a missionary disciple? A missionary disciple is someone who has had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who loves him, desires to grow in love for him, and joyfully shares that love for him with others.

A healthy Church will always be making disciples. A Church that doesn't make disciples or that has stopped making disciples… well … I suggest that such as Church isn’t likely to be around for very many more generations! In the words of Pope St John Paul II: ‘*Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep Him for themselves, they must proclaim him.*’

You may have noticed that in our homilies of late Fr Damian and I have been preaching a lot about missionary discipleship. But it’s not enough for us just to preach about it - as parish communities, we have to do it! This means that we have to change. We have to become parishes of missionary disciples, *making* missionary disciples: people who fall in love with Jesus Christ, desire to grow in love with Jesus Christ, and joyfully share that love with others.

So, what to do? Next weekend, if you possibly can, I invite you to come to Mass, this Mass or whichever one of the parish Masses works for you - when in our homilies, Fr Damian and I will share with you more of this vision we have for these parishes, of why we must and how we can - become parishes of missionary disciples.

It's Jesus's dream, it’s Pope Francis's dream and it’s my dream as your parish priest, (a dream which Fr Damian shares too) that we truly become communities of missionary disciples.

Brothers and sisters, it’s who the Lord calls us to be. If we’re not doing that – if we don’t have the making of missionary disciples at the core of everything we do and are, then we’re not doing the one most fundamental thing that Jesus Christ asks of all of us who bear his name.