

## ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

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**On 24 October 1964 Pope Paul VI proclaimed St. Benedict the Patron of Europe. Today as we celebrate the feast of St. Benedict listen to the description Pope Paul gave of him in the Apostolic Letter of proclamation:**

Messenger of peace.

Moulder of union.

Master of civilisation.

Founder of monastic life.

Above all, Herald of the religion of Christ.

Barely fifty years after the death of St. Benedict, Pope Gregory the Great sent St. Augustine to England from his monastery in Rome. Augustine arrived in Kent in 597AD. Queen Bertha, the Christian wife of King Ethelbert, persuaded her husband to hear the missionary. The King said: “The words and promises you bring are fair enough, but because they are new to us and doubtful, I cannot accept them and forsake those beliefs which I have held so long...the things you wish to share with us you believe to be good and true...we do not wish you harm...nor do we forbid you to win all you can to your faith and religion”. We walk in the footsteps of Benedict and Augustine in these lands and in these times, and in our calling to evangelise. The words of the Second Vatican Council root this calling in the nature of the Church. “The Pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origins, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” . (Decree ‘Ad Gentes’). That Trinitarian foundation of the life of the Church takes us to the heart of who we are and what we are about.

Everything is “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”. Each of us is called and sent by a God who is fully present: He goes before us, is with us and ahead of us. It is this conviction which gives us confidence as missionary disciples. This is the mandate we have in returning to our parishes & Dioceses.

As we read in the first letter of Peter:

“Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have”. (1 Peter 3:15 )

For some, the model of evangelisation will be standing on a street corner, distributing literature, entering challenging conversations with apocalyptic preachers. For others, it will be an intellectual search for truth, a study of the claims of Christianity, not least through its historical foundations. But it was not just his scholarship & spirituality which brought John Henry Newman into the Church. In his Fifth University Sermon he writes that the truth of the Gospel “... has ever been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men...who are at once teachers and patterns of it”. Pope Paul VI reminded us that “Modern man listens more to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses” (Evangeliis Nuntiandi 41). We are all called to be witnesses.

Pope Francis evangelises not just in his words, but also in his gestures and actions. He continues to make the gospel imperative known and accessible to the modern world. His encyclical ‘Laudato Si’ is a profound articulation of Catholic Social Teaching.

Proclaim '15 reminds us that this is part of evangelisation to. These are not just the responsibility of others, things that take place ‘out there’. Evangelisation means that each baptised person has a responsibility to share in whatever way they can ‘the reason for the hope you all have’.

This is the call we receive in today’s Gospel passage. “Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out”, not alone but with another. He instructed them “...to take nothing for the journey except a staff”. Such was the urgency of the task. That is the call given us today – a specific, urgent and zealous mission for the Lord, for the Church and for the communities in which we live.

Our response to this call to evangelisation gives us identity as individual followers of Jesus, as members of a parish and as a creative presence in our communities. Sharing life experiences, sharing faith, “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) and simply the joy of following Him. All are conscious expressions of our desire to evangelise. To show how we have been influenced in this judgment, led to that decision, supported in carrying a burden or a challenge in life.

It is praying for others. Praying with others. Offering guidance, friendship and support to the lonely, the sick, the bereaved and those searching for purpose. It means actively engaging in leadership roles in society, not just helping the victims of injustice but challenging the structures of injustice themselves. Pope Francis again

“We cannot forget that evangelisation is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ, or who have always rejected Him. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face”. (Evangelii Gaudium 15). Let us think for just one moment of a person we know to whom this applies.

Today’s experience is a springboard and a pattern for inspiration and action in our various parishes and Dioceses. Today is a source of renewal, of inspiration to herald a new springtime. Sharing and working with others, proclaiming the treasure of our Catholic Faith, serving the Common Good are the tools we have. The prayers we offer and the resources which will be available for Home Mission Sunday on 20 September will be part of the legacy of ‘Proclaim 15. By ‘naming the hope which is in your heart’ we can become more bold and creative in sharing that hope. The ‘Year of Mercy’ proclaimed by Pope Francis invites us to ‘Open the Doors’ of our churches not just to invite people in, but for us to step out two by two going to places and people and situations we may not even have thought of yet. Evangelisation teams? Perhaps. Companions – Certainly. Nourished with the Bread of Life. Definitely. Convinced of the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: “We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”. (Heb 6:19)