

Easter 5C 2013

It is interesting to note that the Vatican two document on the church, 'Ecclesiam Suam' never describes it as a building or place of worship but always a people – the people of God. Only the telephone directory describes churches as 'places of worship'.

The second reading today is also alluding to this when it says: "*when Paul and Barnabas arrived at Antioch, they assembled the Church and gave an account of all God had done with them and how he opened the door of faith to the pagans*".

Assembling the Church means drawing together the Christian community so that Paul and Barnabas could encourage the early converts to bear witness to their faith before non-believers which is as relevant in the world today as it was then. Blessed Paul VI said that the church exists in order to evangelise unbelievers. In the past I think we put a lot of emphasis on maintenance, often at the expense of mission.

When the retired Pope Benedict was launching the year of faith some years ago he wrote: "the door of faith (Acts 14:27) is always open for us ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into His Church". Notice how he doesn't separate communion with God from communion within the Church.

I don't understand it when people say they believe in God but not the Church. Without the Church, for a start, we would have no Mass or sacraments of which there are seven. The Church describes the sacraments as "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions".

Our job as church people is to allow the door of our personal

faith to open wider, so that like Paul and Barnabas, we can draw new people into the church community. In this way, like us, divine life can be dispensed to them through preaching the Word of God and celebrating the sacraments.

The church doesn't exist for its own sake. It's not about building up its own power base on Earth, although you might be forgiven for getting that impression at times. When I and others meet with Cardinal Pell this coming Tuesday I might be tempted to ask him a few relevant questions in this regard seeing he's the one appointed by Pope Francis to sort out the Vatican bank. Yes the Catholic Church is a huge organization, the world's biggest, owning much property but it once owned a lot more. At the time of the reformation, for instance, the monasteries owned at least one fifth of the land of this country until Henry V¹¹¹ got his hands on it. He closed down about 800 monasteries in the process.

Having said all that, at the end of the day, the church primarily exists as God's chosen instrument for furthering His Kingdom of Love and Justice here on Earth, preparing us for the world to come.