



5th Sunday of Easter, 15 May 2022

by Dr Chris Cotter, Director of Mission and Pastoral Life

The Vatican's Official Synod Handbook (or *Vademecum*) notes that the Church exists to evangelise and that it can never be self-centred. How do we do this? By witnessing "to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family" (*Vademecum*, 1.4). Our readings for the 5th Sunday of Easter speak in a particular way to this loving, selfless and centrifugal missionary imperative for the people of God, the Church.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives the new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). Jesus goes on to say that by sharing in this kind of love we will clearly communicate to the world that we are his followers. The second reading from the book of the Apocalypse (21:1-5) contains the striking image of a new city coming into being, a city where love truly reigns. This love has power; it renews all of creation, transforming mourning, sadness and even death. This is the power of the resurrection which, whilst still to be fully realised, is permeating the entire cosmos. The Easter season is a good time for us to reflect on our experience of this kind of renewing and transforming love in our families, schools, parishes and wider communities. Perhaps you can recall a moment where love like this was made manifest in a real and tangible way.

In the excerpt from the Acts of the Apostles we hear of Paul and Barnabas' journey to strange and foreign places, opening "the door of faith to the pagans" (Acts 14:27). The word 'pagan' originally meant 'rural' or 'rustic'. It indicated that the people were 'not from around here', and worse, that they were 'unrefined' or 'uneducated'. We get a sense that 'pagans' were people who you really wouldn't or shouldn't be bothered with. Pagans might be useful for trade or commerce, but you wouldn't want to give them anything that was really good. In a word, pagans were 'nobodies'. And yet Paul and Barnabas went out to them. They were impelled to share their faith in a gracious, loving God. Interestingly, if you read the text carefully, it is God who opens the door of faith to these 'outsiders'. Mission is God's work, and it could be as close as we can get to a 'role description' for God. God is always on mission and God invites each one of us to share in the mission of love, to go beyond ourselves to the those who "live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world" (*Vademecum*, 1.4). As a synodal Church we each have a role to play, and God is opening the door for us.