

A GARDEN WITH MANY FLOWERS

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IT HELPS ME TO KEEP REMEMBERING THE CHURCH, ABOVE ALL, IS THE UNIVERSAL PEOPLE OF GOD, BORN FROM THE GOSPEL, LOVING ONE ANOTHER AND EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

BY BISHOP BRENDAN LEAHY

A time will come, the Acts of the Apostles says, when "young men shall see visions" and "old men shall dream dreams." At this point in my life, I'm more on the "dream" than the "vision" side. Nevertheless, here goes my mixture of dreams and visions of 'the church I'd like to see.' I'm presenting them in the form of short one-liners. Apologies if they are too pithy.

First, though, I'd like to offer a word about the church. The image of the church as a wonderful garden with many flowers is one that strikes me. Admiring not just this or that flower but the beauty of the garden's many flowers will, I hope, be a vibrant feature of tomorrow's church.

So often, we end up thinking the church is just about us as individuals and the religious department of our lives. Or we think it's the parish structures and the diocese, religious congregations, associations and movements or the Vatican; or we limit it to the spiritual moments of Sunday Mass, Confirmation ceremonies, novenas or consoling funeral services. Or we think of the church almost as an NGO with its social projects and initiatives.

But it helps me to keep remembering the church, above all, is the universal People of God, born from the Gospel, loving one another and empowered by the Spirit. Continuing Jesus' mission in history, each of us personally and all together is endowed with gifts of faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these gifts is love. Love has eyes to help us look around and see the wonderful garden the church is with many flowers to be admired and appreciated. Love brings balance and harmony, and simplicity.

So here goes my list of dreams and visions. I hope that out of a synodal process that I believe won't just be, for the next few years, I'll see a church that is more...

Dynamic – energised through the rediscovery of the Gospel and its art of love, sharing and communicating our experiences of the Word of God.

United – striving to be one in and through the inevitable tensions.



Pilgrimage Church of the Assumption of Mary, Slovenia

Trinitised – women and men, young and old, clergy and lay, moving to the rhythm of the mutual indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit, the Trinity, unity in diversity, our true home.

Centred on Christ – recognising the church is born from and constantly generated by love of Jesus and him crucified.

Missionary – going forth living the New Commandment in missionary service and with global perspective, doing and speaking the truth in love in our world even if not of it.

Pilgrimaging – seeking, finding and accompanying Christ in and with others, not least in the social and existential peripheries where he has already taken up residence 'outside the camp.'

Attentive to the voice of the Spirit – recognising ourselves as friends of the Spirit, soul of the church, exercising communitarian discernment especially in the family, the domestic church.

Beyond the wounds – trusting in God's mercy, facing up to the realities of the pain we've caused and caring enough to offer hope.

Poor – disarmed of the desire to identify ourselves in terms of self-preservation and securities, humbly recognising that we are not in charge. God is.

Contemplative – looking on our world not in judgement, but watching out for the signs of the Resurrection calling forth seeds of a new

world and moving us to care for our planet.

Charismatic – recognising and fanning into a flame the charisms with which the Spirit has embellished the People of God.

Good humoured – not succumbing to eternal griping but helping the world to smile.

Grateful – acknowledging appreciatively to God the gift of the pillars that sustain us as church: the Word of God and sacrament, hierarchy and prophecy, community and charity.

Holy – shining with a saint-next-door type of holiness that we also remember witnessing in our relative 'saints' lying in the cemeteries, reminding us of the Communion of Saints.

Cenacle-like – gathered in the Upper Room just like Mary and the apostles, building ourselves up in prayer.

Marian – radiating a greater lay and less clerical profile, with Mary as our model, letting Christ the Way be the wayfarer among us when two or more of us gather in his name.

Reforming – always beginning again, knowing reform is a constant along our journey through time.

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