***Presidential Address – The Rt Revd David Williams, Bishop of Truro***

***Diocesan Synod***

***September 13, 2025***

*Readings: Philippians 2:11–16; John 3:13–17*

**Part I – Homily on Holy Cross Day**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

We meet today on the Feast of the Holy Cross, a day in which the Church dares to glory in that which the world once despised. The cross, an instrument of torture and humiliation, has become for us the very tree of life, the place of victory, and the sign of God’s redeeming love.

In our reading from Philippians, the Apostle Paul sets before us the universal recognition that “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” He exhorts the faithful to “hold fast to the word of life” and so to shine “as lights in the world.” The Cross, therefore, is not merely the ground of our salvation; it is also the pattern of our discipleship. To confess Christ crucified is to commit ourselves to lives of self-giving love.

In the Gospel according to St John, we hear the mystery expressed with profound simplicity: “The Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world…” The Cross is no tragic accident, nor an afterthought to the Incarnation, but the very heart of God’s eternal plan. Here is revealed the divine love that embraces the world in its brokenness, its beauty, and its need.

To stand at the foot of the Cross is to see that there is no person, no community, no corner of creation, beyond the reach of God’s redeeming love. The Cross is both the proclamation of salvation and the summons to mission. It is in that spirit that I now turn to the work before us as a Synod.

**Part II – Presidential Address: Priorities for the Diocese**

The Cross compels us to consider how we, as a diocesan family, are to live out the Gospel in our time and place. Our common life must be shaped and ordered by the same love which was poured out upon the wood of Calvary. To that end, I wish to reflect upon the following three priorities: Prayer, Mission, and Ministry.

**1. Prayer**

Prayer is the first and essential calling of the Church. It is through prayer that we abide in Christ, seek the will of the Father, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Without prayer, our efforts are reduced to activity alone. With prayer, our work becomes participation in God’s purposes.

As a diocese, we must continue to cultivate patterns of prayer that sustain both clergy and laity. Our churches and chaplaincies must be places where people can encounter the living God, and where the daily rhythm of intercession and thanksgiving is faithfully maintained. Prayer must undergird all that we are and all that we do.

**2. Mission: The Triangulation of Beauty, Justice, and Evangelism**

Christian mission has historically oscillated between emphases on proclamation, social transformation, and cultural engagement. These emphases have often been treated as competing priorities, leading to reductionist understandings of the missio Dei. Yet a more holistic theological account emerges when mission is conceptualized as the triangulation of beauty, justice, and evangelism—a framework that holds together aesthetic, ethical, and evangelical dimensions of God’s redemptive activity.

**2.1 Beauty: The Aesthetic Dimension of Mission**

Beauty has often been marginalized in missiological discourse, relegated to the realm of art or liturgy. However, beauty is central to the biblical witness: creation itself is described as 'very good' (Gen. 1:31), and the Psalms repeatedly link the glory of God to the beauty of holiness. Beauty functions as both revelation and invitation. It discloses God’s character in ways that transcend rational persuasion and awakens in humanity a desire for the transcendent. In a fragmented and disenchanted world, the Church’s embodiment of beauty—through worship, creativity, reconciliation, and community—serves as a sign of the new creation. Beauty thus resists utilitarian reduction and instead contributes to mission by evoking wonder and hope.

**2.2 Justice: The Ethical Dimension of Mission**

Justice is the concrete outworking of God’s righteousness within human history. Scripture consistently portrays God as the defender of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized (e.g., Isa. 58; Luke 4:18–19). Within the triangulation, justice ensures that mission is embodied rather than abstract. Evangelism without justice risks becoming disincarnate proclamation, while beauty without justice risks collapsing into aestheticism. Mission as justice involves advocacy, solidarity, and systemic transformation, rooted in the conviction that the Kingdom of God entails the restoration of shalom. In this sense, justice grounds the Church’s witness in social reality and exposes the eschatological horizon of God’s purposes.

**2.3. Evangelism: The Evangelical Dimension of Mission**

Evangelism remains indispensable within the triangulation, for it articulates and embodies the invitation into reconciliation with God through Christ. While beauty may attract and justice may convict, evangelism interprets these realities in explicitly Christological terms, offering the good news of salvation. Evangelism guards against reducing mission to cultural contribution or social activism by orienting the Church’s activity toward its eschatological telos—the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Col. 1:20). The evangelical dimension ensures that mission remains doxological, centered on the proclamation of God’s reign and the transformation of human lives.

**2.4. The Triangulation of Beauty, Justice, and Evangelism**

To speak of triangulation is to recognize that these three dimensions are not optional add-ons but interdependent. Beauty without justice risks irrelevance in the face of suffering; justice without evangelism risks secularization; evangelism without beauty and justice risks disembodied rhetoric. Only when held together does mission reflect the fullness of the gospel: the God who is beautiful, the God who is just, and the God who saves.  
  
This approach resists dichotomies that have historically fractured missiology (word vs. deed, proclamation vs. presence, evangelism vs. social action). Instead, it frames mission as participation in the triune God’s own life, radiant in beauty, active in justice, and transformative in evangelism. In this way, the triangulation offers not merely a practical strategy but a theological vision: mission as the holistic disclosure of God’s glory in the world.

Mission is not an optional task but the very reason the Church exists. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” The love of God revealed in the Cross is directed towards the whole world, and it is entrusted to us to bear witness to that love.

In a time when many feel disoriented and divided, the Church is called to speak words of hope, to offer communities of welcome, and to embody the reconciling love of Christ. Evangelism, therefore, must not be regarded as a burden, but as a joy – the natural outflow of a people who have themselves received good news. We must have confidence, not in ourselves, but in the Gospel which is God’s power to save.

**3. Ministry**

Finally, ministry. At the heart of ministry is service, modelled on the Lord who came not to be served but to serve, and who gave his life upon the Cross. Ministry belongs to the whole people of God – lay and ordained together – and it is our shared vocation to equip, encourage, and sustain one another in this calling.

The flourishing of ministry in this diocese requires our commitment to nurture vocations, to support those already serving, and to form the next generation for leadership and service in the Church of Christ. This is costly work, but it is also joyful, for through such ministry the Church is built up and the Gospel proclaimed.

**Conclusion**

On this Feast of the Holy Cross, we are reminded that our life as a Church finds its centre and its measure in the love of God revealed in the Crucified One. If we are faithful in prayer, steadfast in mission, and generous in ministry, then we shall, in St Paul’s words, “shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.”

May God grant us grace so to live and labour, that through our common witness many may come to confess with joy that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.