



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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Pastoral Letter

to be read at all Masses on the Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
9/10 October 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges the wealthy man who kneels before him to leave everything and follow him. The man is eager to do so but 'his face fell ... and he went away sad.' Then Peter asks the Lord: 'What about us?' When Jesus invites us to follow him, he knows the demands and challenges set before us. It is in the miracle of his presence that brings hope and life beyond the boundaries we set for ourselves and others. The Lord changes the direction in which we have let our lives grow and removes whatever hinders goodness. He heals our wounds and renews our strength. He promises us eternal life.

Peter's question: 'What about us?' has been asked in many ways during the past eighteen months of the pandemic. Despite the suffering, anxiety, and disruption, we have learned a great deal about the goodness of people in our neighbourhoods and beyond. We thank God for the selfless service of the NHS and other care workers in their support of the sick and the dying, the isolated and the lost.

Next Sunday, I will launch our Diocesan Year of the Eucharist during the 6.30pm Mass in the Cathedral. We will also begin the diocesan stage of preparation for World Synod of Bishops. Clergy and laity are invited to join me for that Mass either in person or via live stream. The Year of the Eucharist celebrates the Eucharist at the heart of the life and mission of the Church as we gather people back to Mass and the Sacraments. It will be celebrated throughout the diocese, in every church and school. I hope it will help us to grow as a Diocese in our love of the Eucharist and to deepen our appreciation of it through the liturgy. I pray that we will revitalise and renew our faith through a deepening prayer and devotion of the Eucharist, and be strengthened and nourished to go out and serve the world.

The Synod of Bishops has been called by Pope Francis who has urged us to have a vision of missionary communion focused on evangelisation. For the first time, the Synod process of 'walking together' begins in each diocese before the Bishops meet nationally, regionally and finally at the Universal Church with the final Synod Gathering of Bishops in 2023 with the Pope. More information will be circulated in due course by the Vicariate for Faith & Mission, which is coordinating both the Year of the Eucharist and the Synod process.

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The bishop in each diocese has a key role in listening to the people of God in his diocese, and under the power of the Holy Spirit, to hear and discern what is being said of that Church. Each local Church is a fundamental part of the Universal Church, so what happens in each local Church contributes to the whole.

The Synod is also a pilgrimage of the whole People of God in discerning the way the Church needs to be renewed in our present post-pandemic time. Like any pilgrimage, the journey is part of the whole experience. Our Year of the Eucharist will open our hearts to the Holy Spirit in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. We will speak and listen with confidence and to help the Church ‘...[to go] out from herself, open herself to a new horizon, and when she comes home, she is no longer the same, so her home won’t be the same.’ (Pope Francis, Let Us Dream)

Therefore I invite you to join me in reflecting on what we have learnt as a Diocese since the first pandemic lock-down in March 2020. There will be ample opportunities to meet as a parish, partnership or in a specific group and details of these opportunities will be announced. We will look at our response to the conditions created by the pandemic and to any other issues we feel we can learn from. We need to take good time to pause and reflect, as did the disciples and others who were challenged by the Lord as he accompanied them. We will reflect on what we should do more of, on what we might need to do less of, and indeed on what we should stop doing, so that we will better sustain the healthy life of our Diocese for the preaching of the Gospel through stronger communion, participation, and mission. These reflections will feed into our discernment of what we contribute to the Synod.

These challenging times for the Church and her mission demand that our love of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist is deep and abiding. He is the source of our life and meaning. His outpouring for us on Calvary, celebrated in the Holy Eucharist draws us on in our pilgrimage. Jesus feeds us on our life’s pilgrimage as we discern together the way ahead.

I look forward to celebrating with you all the Year of the Eucharist and joining you in discernment of what the Holy Spirit is stirring in us for the future of our Diocese and of the Universal Church. Let us pray for our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for the bishops and for all the People of God in our re-dedication to communion, participation and mission.

Yours devotedly in Christ



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