



# DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of  
The Right Reverend Terence J Brain  
Bishop of Salford*

Dear Family of God in Salford Diocese,

Which will be the best selling Christmas song this year? Which tune will catch the mood: what lyric will say what we want to hear? What's the word on the street? Will it be The Priests, or SuBo (Susan Boyle), or Madonna that sing the words? Or will it be the Word of God that strikes a chord with us? A phrase used by Pope Benedict in a book he wrote a few years ago speaks of "the symphony of the Word of God".

This Advent, will we hear the symphony that the Pope described as "a melody composed of many, apparently discordant strains in the contrapuntal interplay of Law, Prophets, Gospel, and Apostles." All the different ways that words in Scripture can express the Truth. All the different lyrics and songs that sing to us of the truth of God the Father: Revelation, The Word of God.

During the weeks of Advent, the Church draws out of her store-room all the different sorts of "music" that is the Bible, the symphony of the Word of God. We hear from the Law, from the Prophets, from the Gospels and from the Apostles. And we are moved to our very being by the wonder of this "music" - "*What marvels the Lord works for us! Indeed we were glad.*" (Ps 125:3) The symphony of the Word of God enters into our very being. Unlike any other song which can move our emotions, the symphony of the Word of God doesn't just move our emotions: it changes us, changes our very being, into union with God the Father. The symphony of the Word of God brings new life to us, "*for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of his glory*" (Baruch 5:9).

This is the wonder of the Word of God: listen to it over and over. Use Advent as a time to reflect: let God's word be in the background of your life, gently playing in your soul; in time changing you into his own wonderful being: become the sacrament of God! The Word of God, the first Word; the last Word; the crescendo of the symphony: "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.*" (Jn1:14).

The Word of God, made flesh amongst us: now all experiences can find meaning in The Word, Jesus who is Lord of all Creation. All hopes and longings: all regrets and failings; all joys and love; all my life can be safely put into this harmony that is the Word of God, made flesh. All we would want – for Christmas, for life, for ever.

In a world that is afraid and often sees only doom and despair for the future; no purpose or value to sustain our lives, then it is important that we listen to the symphony of the Word, God made man.

*“Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.”*  
(Lk3:6)

Every valley, every mountain, warped things straightened, rough things smoothed – and for all. This should be music to our ears. The symphony of the Word of God, and we are called to play that symphony to everyone we share our lives with. Play it, not on an MP3, or CD, but to pick up the instrument of faith - and play: become the sacrament of God! These weeks before Christmas is the time set by the Church to practice our scales!

✠ Terence J. Brain  
Bishop of Salford

*Given at Wardley Hall on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009 and appointed to be read in all churches and chapels of the diocese on the weekend of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December, the Second Sunday of Advent.*