



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

*To be read in all Churches on the weekend of 19th/20th May,
the Feast of Pentecost*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is plenty of scriptural evidence to suggest that the disciples were left with a degree of confusion as Jesus departed from them at His Ascension. Having been able to get used to his return to them after the resurrection, they would again have seen him as their leader, guide and decision-maker. How relieved they must have been after the traumatic events of Good Friday and their sense of loss. But now, suddenly, he announces that he is going and, rather more alarmingly, he leaves them with a mission “to go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news and baptise...” What on earth would they have made of that? Jesus had sent them out on a local mission before, but now they are to be alone and left with the command to go out to the whole world.

But of course they are not to be alone. Jesus has told them that he will be with them always and he will send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who will remind them of all that he has said to them and lead them in all truth. I think that we must allow for some sense of bewilderment on the part of the disciples as to who this Advocate might be and how it will all work out. God has His plan but the disciples and all of us as their descendants, are to have the privilege and the challenge of putting that plan into action. Pope Francis, in all of his letters to us, most particularly in his most recent “Gaudete et Exsultate” (Rejoice and be Glad) reminds us of our personal involvement in making Christ present in our world and continuing His work through our personal holiness and action.

I am very pleased and grateful to see how the people of this Diocese are responding to that invitation. Our pastoral project “Hope in the Future” is being interpreted in so many different and exciting ways in our parishes and we are certainly building that sense of mission and purpose which not only strengthens our parish communities but also has an impact on our wider neighbourhoods, particularly for the benefit of the poor, the marginalised and the isolated.

While we have seen many Catholics drift away from any attachment to a parish, even among our family members, there is every reason to believe that people will want to return when they recognise that Faith has an essential place in our lives and is not something that can be replaced by money, material goods and a very superficial sense of having fun.

I am also very grateful for the efforts of so many people to adjust to the amalgamation of parishes, even where this has included the closure of churches. The call to mission, throughout the centuries, has always meant the need to change and to step out into the unknown. But we must also remember that much remains the same in all that we believe and understand that we are called to be and to do.

On the Monday following this Feast of Pentecost, Pope Francis has asked us to celebrate a new Feast of Mary, Mother of the Church". Mary, from the moment of the Annunciation, must have lived with the confusion of all that was asked of her: The birth of Jesus, the exile in Egypt, the constant movement of His ministry, His death and Resurrection. How important it is to keep her with us in our journey, with its demands and uncertainty. The Lord has told us that He remains with us always. So does Mary, the most faithful of His disciples.

God bless you for all that you are doing to build, strengthen and renew our Faith. We travel together and ask "Stay with us Lord on our journey" as we build and strengthen our Church for future generations

Yours devotedly,

+John

Bishop of Salford