



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

To be read and distributed on the weekend of 26th – 27th November, First Sunday of Advent 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We come to the beginning of a New Year in the life of the Church. We need to acknowledge the continuing changes and challenges within our nation and internationally. So many people face conflict and the impact of climate change and, even in our own communities, there is increasing poverty and stress. This new year invites us to consider how we may best express the Gospel values and meet the demands of those most important commandments of the Law, as declared by Jesus Himself: “You must love the Lord Your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself”. The lived reality will be different for each one of us in the personal circumstances of our lives. I wish to consider two initiatives in which, I believe, the Holy Spirit is calling us to participate.

I wrote to you exactly a year ago asking for your active engagement with the Universal Synod called by Pope Francis, an invitation to all Catholics to reflect on the way the Holy Spirit was asking us to move forward as Church in these next generations.

I would like to thank all those who joined in this prayerful journey of discernment. Over 1500 individuals in this Diocese took part, with group submissions received from families, schools, organisations and parishes. Not all of these were Catholics who attend church regularly.

The responses were carefully read and distilled into themes and a report, which is available to read on the Diocesan website, was sent to the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. Together with reports from the other Dioceses in England and Wales this contributed to a National Synthesis. Bishops from across the world will meet in October 2023 and October 2024 to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Universal Church, through the People of God.

Building on the good work of the Universal Synod, and our own project Hope in the Future, I believe it is right to continue that “synodal” process here in our own Diocese, by holding our own Diocesan Synod. Pope Francis is clear that this way of walking together and listening to each other ‘is what God expects of the Church in the third millennium’. A Diocesan Synod is an important and solemn event in the life of a Diocese in which Bishop, priests and lay-people come together in a spirit of prayer to discern together what God is asking of His Church in our Diocese and will help us to live out our calling to be Missionary Disciples and Ambassadors for Christ, accompanying each other on the journey of life. It is a journey by which we, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, can together set the future direction and priorities of the life and mission of our Diocese.

It is hoped that the Diocesan Synod will be officially opened at the Chrism Mass in 2023. It is important that we, individually and together, listen to God speaking through the scriptures, through the living tradition of the Church, as well as in our lives and the lives of others, particularly those on the margins of Church and society. My prayer for each of us is that we would allow ourselves to be truly open to the presence of the Spirit and His promptings and recognize the crucial part we each play in the Church's Mission.

More details about the process will follow in the New Year but in the meantime let us all pray for the success of the Diocesan Synod and that each of us prayerfully consider how we can contribute. This may be as a parish or deanery Synod member, by speaking to family and friends about their experience of the Church or by attending a group discernment session.

A simple prayer that we might use could be:

“Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey. Help us to listen to each other and to what you are saying to us, so that we may prayerfully discern the way that you wish us to go, and fulfil all that you are asking of us”.

The second initiative involves a very simply change in our way of living. You may have heard of a recent study from the University of Cambridge that estimates that about a quarter of Catholics in the United Kingdom observe abstinence from meat on Fridays, as a penitential act and remembrance on the day of Christ's suffering and death. This is a tradition that has been promoted, as a spiritual exercise since the 9th Century. But the Cambridge study suggests that this “spiritual and penitential” gesture actually prevents 55,000 tonnes of carbon being emitted into the atmosphere every year, equivalent to 82,000 people taking a return flight from London to New York. So, such a “spiritual” gesture suddenly has an important practical impact on our carbon emissions, and the environment. What if all Catholics were to observe a meat-free Friday? What if Catholics around the world were to adopt this simple, and not demanding, practice? The impact on our environment would be considerable.

We are all asked to make changes like this to assist in healing the damage being done to the environment. We cannot leave changes to politicians and industry. As Pope Francis says, “each and every one of us has a part to play”. Maybe abstaining from meat on Fridays is an important way we can put our faith into practical action.

As Christians, we look forward in hope, asking that we may all be channels of God's love, in the difficult times we face in today's world.

May our daily prayer always include that invitation to Jesus Himself; “Stay with us, Lord, on our journey”

Yours devotedly,



Bishop of Salford

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