



A PASTORAL LETTER

On Journeying Together

To be read at all Masses on Sunday 17th October 2021

My dear brothers and sisters,

During the long months of the pandemic, we have been grateful to many volunteers, not least to the stewards who welcomed us at the doors of our churches. In a similar way, this Sunday, I want to welcome all who have returned across the Diocese and point to the many graces and some of the challenges which lie ahead.

A TIME FOR LISTENING

Pope Francis invites us, at this juncture of history, to listen more attentively. The Holy Father calls this *Lived Synodality* or *Journeying Together*. In a world of noise and strident voices, it is the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit to which we must be attentive. To help facilitate such reflection, you will find questions on our Diocesan website. Yet, the Pope describes this initiative as “*Not so much organising events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another*”.ⁱ This means giving time to the silence of prayer and being attentive to all we have received in Scripture and Tradition. On Sunday, Pope Francis said this is a time to “*devote to prayer and adoration – this prayer we neglect so much: to adore, make room for adoration ... listening to what the Spirit wants to say to the Church*”.ⁱⁱ May this reflective time lead us to give more time to the silence of prayer and wherever possible, Eucharistic Adoration. The Holy Father also invites to be more attentive to each other, especially to the cries of the poorest. In a striking image, the Pope asks us to take “*time to look others in the eye ...*”ⁱⁱⁱ May this invitation lead us to renew contact with many who have been isolated during the pandemic and those left on the margins of society.

The Holy Father indicates our listening is not about opinion surveys, it is first and foremost a “*spiritual process*” demanding the same supernatural outlook to which James and John were called in the Gospel. The two young Apostles didn’t understand what it meant to be seated with Christ in glory, so Jesus gently tells them: “*You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I must drink?*”.^{iv} Our Saviour speaks of His Cross while they think of worldly visions and advantages. They were yet to come to recognise how “*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*”.^v This is the Sacrifice of the Cross made present in the offering of every Mass, so we may participate in His Sacrifice, His total self-offering to the Father.^{vi}

KEEPING THE LORD’S DAY HOLY

Pope Francis speaks of how *journeying together* (synodality) finds its supreme expression when we gather at Mass. Before the pandemic came, we might have taken going to Mass on Sunday almost for granted. Yet, from earliest years the faithful have made great sacrifices to gather on the first day of the week, even when this meant rising long before dawn and facing threats of violence.

The faithful always put the Eucharist first in their lives and so first in their week. In this way we recognise that keeping the Lord's Day holy is God's command, imprinted on human nature from the beginning.^{vii} Israel kept the sabbath on the seventh day to celebrate the completion of creation. The Church celebrates the fulfilment of the sabbath on the first day of a new creation, the Day of the Lord's Resurrection. This is a time for us to renew our efforts to keep Sunday holy with the Mass always at its heart.

THE THREAT TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT AND THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

Next month, the threats to our natural environment will bring world leaders to Glasgow. A challenge which demands more than merely a transition in technology. To embrace our responsibility for the earth we need the perspective of God's purpose in creation, the perspective which the celebration of Sunday gives. If we recognise that creation is for the glory of God, we will want to see the cleanest air; the waters free of pollutants; and the land never reduced to a rubbish tip. We will want to find the wisest ways to reduce and eliminate harmful emissions. We will also avoid whatever is anti-human in a false 'environmentalism' recognising the sanctity of human life and the value of science and technology as accomplishments of God-given creativity.^{viii}

The world always finds itself in a mess, not merely by a deterioration in the natural environment, but due to a deterioration in the moral environment. Pope Francis notes how "... *the book of nature is one and indivisible and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family and social relations*".^{ix} The repeated assaults on marriage and family and the sanctity of human life, constitute threats to our human environment. This month the Euthanasia Lobby seeks to introduce the practice of assisted suicide, threatening a radical change in the environment in which the sick and the dying have been cared for since Christianity first came to our land. All these challenges provide us with opportunities to raise our voices in defence of the value of human life and for the care of those most vulnerable.

LET US JOURNEY TOGETHER

May our time, marked by so many graces and challenges, bring us together every Sunday at Mass to recognise in Pope Francis's words that "*The Eucharist ... is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and inexhaustible life ...*" for "*... Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God*".^x How wonderful it is that we receive this Eucharistic invitation at the start of each new week.

May we continue to *journey together* in the light of the Eucharist,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Papal Homily 10th October 2021

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^{iv} Mk 10:38

^v Mk. 10:45

^{vi} Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1366 & 1368

^{vii} Cf. Ex. 20: 8-10

^{viii} Cf. Gaudium et Spes no. 39

^{ix} Laudato Si no. 6

^x Laudato Si no. 236