



Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter on the Mass and the Eucharist

**appointed to be read at Sunday Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham
on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th February 2023; The First Sunday of Lent**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

At the Mass of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday this year, a very special occasion when we celebrate and give thanks for the gift of the Eucharist, we will have the opportunity to begin to receive once again the Precious Blood of Christ during Holy Communion. In preparation for the return of this special moment, I've arranged that a simple little leaflet on the Mass be produced for use in all parishes throughout this Season of Lent. My hope is that this leaflet will play a part in helping us to reflect prayerfully upon, and to deepen still more, our understanding of the Mass. Throughout Lent I would like to encourage you to think about the Mass in these two ways: first, as a treasured place where we can truly encounter Christ Jesus, our Saviour; then, secondly, to see Christ himself, whom we encounter here in Mass, as the one who motivates and sends us out to recognise, love and honour His presence in all the people we meet, especially the disadvantaged and those most in need.

In our celebration of Mass, the Crucified and Risen Lord invites each of us to encounter Him; we come into His presence and we are invited to open our hearts to Him. Why? Because he loves us and cares about all that is going on in our lives. Here in Mass we remember and celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made for us through His death on the Cross and His Resurrection from the dead. We celebrate that the Crucified and Risen Christ Jesus is now truly here for each of us as the Bread of Life and as the Chalice of Salvation. He feeds us spiritually, and brings us His strength, comfort and healing. He also empowers and send us out to bear courageous witness to Him in our daily lives, safe in the knowledge that He walks with us, and so we are never on our own.

What must we do at Mass so that we can truly have a heart-to-heart with Christ? Simply this: bring to Him all that is going on in our lives: our joys, hopes and desires, as well as our worries and struggles, particularly the ways in which we fall short of what we know the Lord wants for us. It is here too that, in the scriptures, we are invited to let the Lord teach and inspire us; and in feeding us spiritually in Holy Communion, to allow Him to nourish and help us to live out our faith each day.

This leads to the second way of looking at the Mass; to see it as a challenge, encouragement and inspiration to the ways in which we live out our faith. Pope Saint John Paul II spoke of the Eucharist

as 'the active school of love for neighbour'. He saw clearly the unity there should be between the breaking of the Eucharistic bread in the Mass and our Christian commitment each day to work with Christ for the creation of a world transformed by His love, forgiveness, compassion and mercy. St John Paul II recognised that it is here in the Mass, in our encounter with Christ, that we are challenged and encouraged to grow in greater awareness of the dignity of each and every person in the eyes of God. Christ Jesus, whom we truly encounter here in Mass, wishes to fashion us, his disciples, into a community of people who seek to unite prayer with action, praise with the seeking of justice, and adoration with the transformation of our society. Why here at Mass? Because we believe that the Risen Christ, who is truly present here in the Eucharist, and to whom we rightly show such respect and reverence, is the same Christ Jesus who is also truly present in every person, especially in the disadvantaged and those most in need. So, in and through our encounter with Christ here in Mass, we find ourselves sent out to love and serve Him in those we meet each day, in our homes, places of work and neighbourhoods.

This Lent I want to encourage you in all the excellent ways you are living out your Eucharistic faith by loving and serving Christ in those around you. Thank you for your prayer, which must underpin everything you seek to do; for your involvement in local food banks and warm banks, the soup kitchens, the work of the parish Justice & Peace and Saint Vincent de Paul groups; the collection of warm clothes this winter for the homeless and those seeking refuge here; your generous financial support for local charities and also for CAFOD who, working with their local partners on the ground, are bringing much needed relief to people in Turkey, Syria, and so many other troubled areas of the world. In all of these ways, and in the many other examples of your outreach, you are not simply responding to the needs of others. You are doing much more because, as Christ's disciples, everything you do for others, you do out of love of Him whom you encounter afresh in every Mass. Christ is the WHY behind everything we do as his disciples. He it is who motivates and sends us out from Mass into our local communities to recognise, love, honour and serve Him, in the poor and disadvantaged, and in those many people who are now struggling to make ends meet during this cost of living crisis.

This inseparable connection between the Eucharist and our response to the needs of the others around us, especially the poor and exploited, cannot be emphasised enough. The breaking of bread, the transformation of what is bread and wine into the sacramental presence of Christ here in Mass, asks of us that we allow ourselves to be transformed and guided by the Lord. In this way we can each play our part, as the Lord's instruments, in shaping our society and world more in accordance with the values of God's Kingdom. May this Lent be a blessed time when you allow the Lord to draw ever nearer to you with His love, and to send you out as his co-workers, his disciples. Thank you for all you do to treasure and to live out each day our beautiful Eucharistic faith!

With prayer and good wishes,

+ Patrick

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