



Archdiocese of Southwark

Pastoral Letter 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time 11 February 2024 – Sunday before Ash Wednesday

*Please to use and / or make available, according to your judgement,
on the weekend of 10/12 February 2024*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

With Christmas, the great Feast of God entering our world, still a recent memory, it perhaps seems strange that we are now fast approaching the season of Lent. For some, the Christmas crib and decorations have only just come down at Candlemas. Now Lent, beginning this coming Ash Wednesday, provides an opportunity to reflect on the great mystery of God choosing to be with us.

Our readings today, and throughout the Lenten season, ask us to take seriously our responsibility as disciples. How are we living and sharing the Good News of the Lord Jesus? What does it mean to you that God is with you and that God is with and for all people?

When we know personally the Lord Jesus' healing and loving embrace, we cannot keep it to ourselves. By our baptism into Christ, we are commissioned to reach out to those who do not know how precious they are in God's sight, to seek those who have given up their faith, or never known its beauty. The open arms of the Child in the manger, and the open arms of our Saviour on the Cross, are an invitation from God-with-us – to us, and through us to others.

We are each, without exception, called to be an extension of the Lord Jesus' reach to all people. His open arms welcome all. During Lent, this great season of Christian renewal, we ponder anew how we might help others find their way into the loving fold of Christ's Church. The Lord Jesus reached out to the leper with compassion and healed him. How can we reach out to those who need to receive the healing power of faith and the transformative love of God?

It is sometimes easy to forget our common vocation of discipleship and overlook the fact that the responsibility for evangelisation – of spreading the Good News of the

Lord Jesus in word and deed – is something shared by all the baptised: laity, consecrated women and men, and clergy. Together, as married, single, lay, ordained, or consecrated people, evangelisation is a work of the entire People of God. This requires all of us being fully aware of our baptismal vocation and our collective mission to bring to life the Good News of Jesus Christ to our families, culture, and society. This, wrote Pope St Paul VI, is our “*deepest identity*” as Christians. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14)

“*Every Christian is a missionary,*” wrote Pope Francis, “*to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples.’*” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120) How do we encounter the love of God in Christ Jesus? By being part of the living community of believers that is the Church; and through that vital contact with the Lord in prayer, and our participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession. We encounter the love of God by learning to recognise God in the faces and the suffering of others, by allowing ourselves to become infected by the holiness of joy, zeal, and love. Only our encounter with God’s love can cause us to be “missionary disciples,” bearers of Christ’s loving mercy in our daily lives.

As we enter this season of Lent, please join with me in renewing our shared commitment to holiness, evangelisation, and mission. By the witness of our lives, we can each reveal to others the love and mercy of Christ. Let us work together, as clergy, laity, and consecrated people, all of us missionary disciples, committed to spreading the Gospel to all God’s people.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the coming season of Lent be a time of grace and renewal for each one of you as we embrace our call to proclaim the Light which enlightens all people (Cf. John 1:9). At our baptism, the Spirit given to us “... was not a spirit of fear, but of power and love.” (2 Timothy 1:7) May the power of God’s love and mercy in Christ steer us on our Lenten journey.

With every blessing and the assurance of my prayers and gratitude
Yours devotedly in Christ

+ John Wilson

Metropolitan Archbishop of Southwark