

PASTORAL LETTER

Lent 2010

Happy are those who trust in the Lord

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It seems like only yesterday that we were celebrating the feast of the Epiphany and the revealing of Christ to the wise men from the east. They followed the star and it brought them to kneel before the infant Christ to whom they offered their exotic gifts. But, unknown to them, at that time they were being gifted by the Lord in a way far richer than anything that they had been able to offer him.

St Matthew sums it up when he writes at the end of the story that they returned to their own country by a different way. That phrase means much more to me than just something about geography or map reading or the fear of Herod. It says something profoundly spiritual about conversion and the journey of faith, and it's entirely appropriate for us to revisit it today, as we stand on the threshold of Lent.

We too have followed a star; we too have journeyed in faith to bring our gifts – not least the gift of ourselves – to the Lord. In return, he has gifted us with so much and he has called us to be stewards of those gifts. As we recognise this, our lives, like those of the wise men, will begin to take a different direction. Our journey of faith continues, but in a different way. The season of Lent marks yet again an opportunity for that change of direction, for conversion and for the deepening of our faith. It is a time for generous giving and for a renewed trust in the goodness and love of the Lord who calls us to be his disciples.

The context of today's Gospel is Luke's account of the call of the first disciples. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus inviting Peter to put out into the deep with total trust in him, so that he could become a "fisher of men". In the passage from Luke that immediately precedes today's passage, we read of Jesus spending the night in prayer before he chooses those who were to be his special companions. Today's Gospel tells of Jesus coming down from the mountain and introducing his newly chosen apostles to a sea of humanity into which they, as "fishers of men", must enter without fear, casting their nets for a catch and becoming, in their turn, the star that will lead men and women to Jesus.

This is the beginning of the Church which we know and love and within which we find the Lord. This is the Church in which, through baptism, we begin to share in the work and the loving of Christ. This is the world of the poor, the needy, those who are troubled and distressed, and Jesus calls us to be his presence among all people, to bring joy, satisfaction and comfort – but, not without cost.

When the new disciples heard Jesus' words, they must have wondered, as perhaps we do ourselves, "how can this be?" The answer to that question lies in the angel's words to Mary at the start of Luke's Gospel: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." These things will come about because the power of God's Spirit is poured out on the disciples. Through the Spirit, they will discover the courage, the wisdom and the understanding to proclaim and live the Gospel. We, today's disciples, like those first followers, are called to witness to the truth that real joy and happiness and fulfilment come because we trust in the Lord, rather than in those aspects of modern living which are so neglectful of God and seemingly so transient. This understanding of the call to discipleship, and our response to it, has been central to all my recent teaching and forms the lynchpin of our Pastoral Plan,

We come today to the threshold of Lent; it's another opportunity to continue and deepen our journey in faith, bringing us to the Lord in new and exciting ways.

For some – I am thinking particularly of our catechumens seeking baptism and of those seeking to come into full communion with the Church – their journey is quite specific and has a very sharp focus. Easter for them will be a wonderful culmination and fulfilment of deepest hopes. It will bring joy to them and to all us who have journeyed with them.

For those of us who have been longer on the journey, Lent is a time of renewal and ongoing conversion with a greater and more generous concentration on the gifts the Lord has given us. Whatever Lenten penance we undertake, it should aim at making us more aware of the extraordinary love and care the Lord has for us.

For all of us, wherever we are in our journey of faith, Lent is a time for renewed prayer and for giving more time and space to God and to all those who, together with us, make up the human family, the brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's time to seek again the face of Christ. There we will find the compassion and healing love that renews our spirits. Look on that face in the silence of your prayer and give thanks to the Lord who has such love for us. Coming to the heart and face of Christ, we discover anew what it means to be truly one of his disciples, sent out to proclaim and be the Good News of the Kingdom.

May God bless you all,



To be read and made available at all Masses celebrated in the diocese on the weekend of February 13th/14th 2010