



**Pastoral Letter to be read at all Sunday Masses in the Diocese of  
Nottingham on the First Sunday of Lent 2011  
12/13 March 2011**

My dear friends,

On Ash Wednesday, we began our annual Lenten pilgrimage. With the imposition of ashes on our foreheads, we are reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return, and invited to listen attentively to Our Lord's call at the beginning of His ministry in Galilee to 'Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.' By our prayer, fasting and almsgiving during these forty days, we search for what is truly Christian in our lives and thereby renew our faith.

We became Christians when we were baptised, and so if we are to renew our faith in God this Lent, we must reflect on the baptismal promises, when we - or our parents and godparents on our behalf - promised to reject sin and professed the faith of the Church in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Each of us, as today's First Reading from the Book of Genesis reminds us, was created by God; by breathing His life into us, He made us in His own image and likeness, radiant with His glory, beautiful in His eyes. However, in the image that Genesis gives us, pride led Adam and Eve to believe that they were equal to God. By disobeying Him and eating of the tree of life, original sin came into the world, and our original beauty was tarnished, but never destroyed. As St Paul tells us in the Second Reading, from his Letter to the Romans, 'Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned.' If that was the end of the story, there would be no hope for any of us, because we are all sinners, we all make mistakes. However, we believe that God so loved the world that He sent His Son Jesus to live among us as our Saviour; in St Paul's words, 'As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.'

This is the great mystery which we celebrate during Lent and Easter - the new life that Jesus won for us in His Life, Death and Resurrection; by doing penance for our sins, we thank God for the gift of that new life which we received in Baptism and which we celebrate when we come to Mass. By practising in our daily lives the faith that we profess each Sunday at Mass, we become holy in God's eyes and reveal His love for all of us by giving a good example to those whom we meet.

Most of us received the Sacrament of Baptism in the first weeks of our lives. However, the Lord freely calls people to the waters of Baptism who have come to believe in Him later in life. Today, in St Barnabas' Cathedral, people from throughout our Diocese who have come to faith in Jesus Christ will present themselves during the Rite of Election. This Rite is so called because they have been 'elected' or 'chosen' by God to share in the gifts which He has given us. On the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, they will receive the 'Scrutinies', by which they will be strengthened in their faith by Christ, and will be presented with the Profession of Faith and the Lord's Prayer. They will go on to be baptised, confirmed and receive Holy Communion for the first time during the Easter Vigil. We will accompany them with our prayers during this Lent as we prepare to welcome them into the Catholic Church at Easter, when we celebrate Christ's Resurrection, His triumph over the sin and death which came into the world because of Adam's pride.

However, this afternoon's celebration in the Cathedral will be truly historic, because in addition to those who will be joining us as Catholics in our Diocese, we shall also welcome into our Catholic community groups of clergymen and parishioners from three Anglican parishes, who will join the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. They will be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church during the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies, and, God willing, the clergymen who have accompanied them on their journey into our Catholic family will be ordained to the priesthood after Easter. Our Holy Father Pope Benedict has asked us to welcome warmly our brothers and sisters from the Church of England who have asked to become Catholics; he sees the establishment of the Ordinariate as a prophetic gesture that can contribute to the ultimate goal of our relationships with non-Catholic Christians - full unity as one body, one spirit in Christ. I know that we will welcome all who wish to join us this Easter, whether into the Ordinariate or into our parishes, with open hearts.

Although it is a penitential season, Lent is not a time to be miserable, but to be joyful in the Lord who calls us closer to Himself by inviting us to turn away from everything that keeps us from Him and to be faithful to the Gospel. By reflecting on our baptismal promises, and by our prayer, fasting and almsgiving, I hope and pray that all of us, this Lent, will join our brothers and sisters who will be baptised at Easter in deepening our faith and living it more fully in our daily lives. I wish you all every blessing for a happy and holy Lent and Easter.

+ Malachy Mc Mahon OP

Bishop of Nottingham

*Bishop's House  
NOTTINGHAM  
February 2011*