

**Pastoral Letter of the
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
on the Second Sunday of Advent
Saturday 6 / Sunday 7 December 2014**

Dear friends in Christ,

The season of Advent is short and to the point. In today's Second Reading, St Peter reminds us that we are waiting for 'the new heavens and new earth'. For this reason, he reminds us, we should do our 'best to live lives without spot or stain'.

The point of Advent is that we are getting ready for the Second Coming of Jesus, even as we prepare for our annual celebration of his Birth at Christmas. The shortness of Advent reminds us that 'the Day of the Lord will come like a thief'; we do not know when the Lord will return in glory, but we do know that he will.

Because of this, the preaching of Saint John the Baptist, in the Gospel that we have just heard, is as important to us today as it was to his hearers:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

In her preaching of the Gospel, her celebration of the sacred liturgy and the sacraments, and her service of the wider community, the Church continues John the Baptist's mission as the voice crying in the wilderness of the world in which we live. Whether it is her call for all people to repent of their sins and accept for themselves the salvation Christ freely offers us; her constant defence of the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death; her teaching that we should seek to live like Jesus in everything that we say and do; her vision of a different and better future for

all the peoples of the world so that they may live in peace and fellowship enjoying the fruits of God's Creation; her support of marriage and the family as being the bedrock of society; her giving a voice to the voiceless in their thirst for justice; her worship of God in Spirit and truth – in all these things, the Church is a voice crying in the wilderness, calling us to prepare a way for the Lord and helping us to live holy lives.

That Church is us – each and every one of us – and if we are to be the voice crying in the wilderness, we should seek, once again, to prepare a way for the Lord in our hearts.

This Advent, I would like to suggest two ways in which we can straighten the Lord's paths in our lives.

First, Advent, like Lent, is a good time for us to go to confession. The sacrament of reconciliation calls us back to God and restores the grace of our Baptism, when we were first consecrated to share in Jesus' mission as Priest, Prophet and King; we humbly acknowledge our need of God, admit that we are not at the centre of our own universe, and receive the forgiveness which the Father freely offers us in Christ.

When he was elected, Pope Francis said, 'I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This is a profession of faith that it would be good for all of us to make this Advent; let us use these few weeks to rebalance our lives, to make sure that Jesus is at the very heart of them.

The second way is one in which we can help our friends and neighbours who used to join us for Mass on Sundays but maybe now do not. Why not invite them to join you for Mass? Or, even better, what about offering to walk with them or give them a lift next Sunday? It can be very easy to slip away from the practice of the faith and find excuses not to gather for Mass. But just as we make a big effort to gather our families around us on Christmas Day, we should make an effort to gather together as God's family in his house every Sunday – and we should not leave the ministry of welcoming God's people to others. As Catholics, the Mass is the source and summit, the beginning and end, of our week – and it is something that we should want to share with others when we are sent out at the end of each Mass on our mission to glorify the Lord in our daily lives.

As this year comes to a close, we have much to be thankful to God for in the Diocese of Nottingham. We think particularly of our families, and the work of our parishes, schools and chaplaincies, all of which are expressions of God's infinite love; we think as well of our priests, deacons and religious, who serve us so faithfully, together with all those who, day in and day out, bring God's love to others. We pray for them,

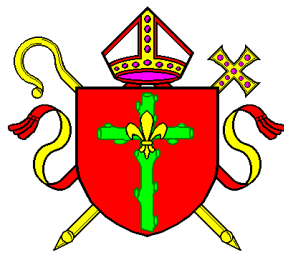
and ask the Lord to bless us with vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life.

This Christmas, let us remember to pray that the Lord will soon send us a new Bishop of Nottingham, to guide us and shepherd us, since the Church of Nottingham is not fully alive without her Bishop. We also pray, with great love and affection, for Archbishop Malcolm, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for his thirteen years as our Bishop. His preaching, his travelling the length and breadth of our Diocese, particularly to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to our younger parishioners, his kindness and his gentle compassion will always be remembered in our Diocese; he was a much-loved Bishop of Nottingham, and he will always have a special place in our hearts.

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families for a blessed Advent and Christmas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. McGovern". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Rev Mgr Canon Thomas McGovern Prot Ap
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham



**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

December 2014