



**Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
on the Second Sunday of Lent,
Saturday 3 / Sunday 4 March 2012**

My dear friends in Christ,

In the Gospel we have just heard, St Mark tells us how Jesus is transfigured; he appears in radiant glory, and his three disciples are filled with fear as they see him in that glory. This is clearly a preview of the Resurrection; as Jesus is joined in his Transfiguration by Moses and Elijah, we can also be sure that this is a glimpse of the end of time, when Christ will be all in all. The disciples are overawed by this event, and wish to hang on to the moment, this view into the future, by setting up booths. But this remarkable event was only a foretaste of the Resurrection of Jesus, and is given to us to sustain us on our journey through Lent. Taking a longer view, it is the Resurrection of Jesus which forms the basis of our hope of eternal life; as our resurrection from the dead is the goal of our life, the Resurrection of Jesus supports us on our pilgrimage through life.

We are reminded that for Christian people the future is not unknown or uncertain. We are a pilgrim people, and our wishes and desires for the future are not based on speculation but on the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus. This underlying truth sustains us in our faith and will enrich our path through Lent.

Just as the disciples catch a glimpse of the future which awaits them, so too we can catch glimpses of our future, that is, the love of God at work in our daily lives. There are many such moments which give us courage and we are filled with joy. But it is also true to say that there is much about the future which is uncertain and can fill us with dread. So much is changing around us that we do not know what tomorrow holds for us. The economic situation,

rising unemployment, changes in family life and the place of religion in the lives of families and friends all give reasons for us to be fearful.

Since we are part of the changing world, this also applies to our parish and Diocese. What does the future hold for our parish community? Will there be enough priests to celebrate Mass and administer the sacraments to us? Questions like these cannot be easily answered, which is why I want to present to you today a way forward. Your priests and deacons have been studying a document prepared for us called *You are Living Stones*, so that together we may discern a way forward. *You are living Stones* begins in prayerful reflection on the familiar story of Jesus meeting the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and goes on to look at the hard facts facing us concerning priestly vocations. The priests and deacons have now been asked to share that reflection with you, the People of God, so that together we may move forward in faith.

Your parish priest has copies of *You are Living Stones*, and it can be downloaded from the diocesan website. With your Sunday bulletin this week, you will be given an information sheet about this consultation, with some questions for you to think about so that your voice can be heard. I am asking you to reflect seriously on the future of the Church, and to do this by responding to the questionnaires and attending meetings which your parish priest has been asked to organise so that your voice can be heard.

Through these sessions of study and prayer, I hope that you will be able to find ways of working with each other, within your own parish community and with neighbouring parishes, so that all of our personal gifts and talents may be unleashed for the good of the wider community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to assure you that this consultation not a way towards closing churches because of falling attendance at Mass or a relative lack of priests – it is quite the opposite. Together with your priests you will be able to find new ways of ensuring the continuity of the preaching of the Gospel, the celebration of Mass, the administration of the sacraments and all aspects of parish life in your community.

It is eleven years since I became your Bishop, and during that time we have been blessed with sixteen Ordinations to the priesthood, as well as many permanent deacons. Seven priests from overseas and another six from other dioceses in England & Wales have come to work for us in the Diocese of Nottingham, and we also benefit from the presence and ministry of priests

from various religious orders. However, these have not replaced those who have retired or died. At present, there are eleven men in the seminaries studying for the priesthood, two of whom will, please God, be ordained this year. We have been truly blessed but, as is only too obvious to you, many of our priests are either approaching or are over the retirement age of 75 years. We not only need to provide for them, to thank them for their service over many years, but we need to urgently consider what we can do to ensure the future of our parish communities. That is why *You are Living Stones* is timely and necessary.

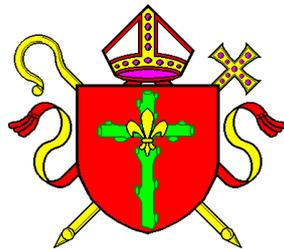
If we now go back to today's Gospel, St Peter's plan to build three booths is put to one side by the Father who tells us to listen to his Son. That is what we must do by prayerful consideration of our future. Then, like the disciples, we will not face the future full of fear but, instead, we will be people of hope discussing amongst ourselves what rising from the dead can mean. The Resurrection of Jesus will then truly inform and inspire our lives.

May our Lenten journey be a time of turning again to the Lord! As we continue our annual season of self-discipline, may our Lenten almsgiving, prayer and fasting help us to listen to Jesus more attentively and walk with him more closely, allowing him to lead us through the pain and uncertainty of the Passion to the glory and joy of the Resurrection.

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Right Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP
Bishop of Nottingham



**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

February 2012