



**Pastoral Letter to be read at all Sunday Masses
in the Diocese of Nottingham on 11 and 12 September 2010
24 Sunday of the Year**

Dear Friends in Christ,

This week we will be witnesses to the second Apostolic Visit of a reigning Pope to our country. Many of us have incredible memories of the historic visit in 1982 of the beloved Pope John Paul II. The visit of our Holy Father Pope Benedict is no less significant. The Pope comes to our country this week which, in many ways, is a foreign land compared with the journey of his predecessor. When we think about the many changes that have taken place in our country since 1982, in technology, in our social outlook, in our collaboration within Europe, the United Kingdom today seems so different.

This leads me to my first point about the Holy Father's visit. For us Catholics, he represents an eternal truth, a fixed point in history. When Our Lord said to St Peter: *"Simon, you are a blessed man, for it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. Now you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church"*, he gave us a spiritual Father to whom we can turn in times of rapid change and be confirmed in our faith and what it stands for in this changing world. The Papacy, and indeed the Holy Father himself, is a focal point of the stability of our faith, our hope and our love. These three virtues are the keystones of our Christian identity. Over the past year, the Church has been under aggressive examination by all parts of society and we have all felt the effects of this. We need the presence of the Pope among us to confirm us in these virtues, because if we are not sure who we are and what our mission in the world is, we will only hesitantly explain and defend our Christianity, almost seeing it as a weakness in itself. Such an attitude is far from our mission: to proclaim the Good News and be witnesses of God's Truth. Bearing witness of God to this world is the basis of our Christian life. And so the Holy Father's presence will confirm us in our mission.

In our society which has become more multicultural and diverse since the visit of Pope John Paul II we need also to see this visit not simply through the eyes of Catholics, but in collaboration with our Ecumenical and Inter-faith partners. This is a time for an exposition of faith and the good it does in our country. There must be no sense of Catholic triumphalism here; all people of faith should be supportive of the visit because the man coming amongst us represents more than just the Catholic Church. He is the Father of a worldwide family and as such, he will meet people of all faiths in this country. In a world where religion and faith are seen as negative attributes, props for the weak hearted or justification for the fundamentalist, the visit will show the Pope as a man of dialogue and listening, of good works and prayer. Exposing the richness and beauty of a life of lived faith will be part and parcel of the visit.

The Pope will also meet with Her Majesty the Queen, her Prime Minister and other leading politicians. As a Head of State himself, he knows the issues that are current in the world; keeping abreast of them through the Papal Diplomatic Corps. This little known action of the Holy See is most important: in 1962, when the world was on the brink of war in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vatican was part of the brokering team that reached the solution. In our time the Vatican plays a large part on the world stage regarding issues of importance to all humanity, such as the environment, nuclear arms reduction and international aid. Being seen as an effective world leader is also part of the value of this visit. When he addresses politicians in Westminster Hall, the Pope will offer his worldview on the current issues to our government. To introduce that sense of world knowledge coupled with his intrinsic Christian values to our political leaders will be an opportunity to show how society is built on love and valuing every human person.

Above all, the visit should be a time of great joy for us. To have our spiritual Father with us must be a source of happiness and I am sure that that happiness will sustain us on our Christian pilgrimage. Playing our part, however we can, is important. And so I ask all of you this week to pray for the success of the visit, both individually and as church communities. Many people will be able to be present at the events; but if you cannot be there, please follow the visit's progress through the media and in the *Magnificat* booklets available to all. Above all let us pray that the graces of the visit will honour our Lord Jesus

Christ, who is the source of all life and goodness, and that in turn, we are renewed in the Spirit to proclaim the Good News wherever we may be.

With every blessing

+ Malcolm McMahon OP

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Bishop of Nottingham