

Pastoral Letter  
To be read at all masses  
On the Second Sunday of Advent  
3 and 4 December 2005

Dear Friends,

During the last few days I have been reading the pastoral plans that the parishes have prepared. They express your ideas for the development of the parishes in the Diocese of Nottingham. Some of them are very detailed whilst others give a more general view of the future growth of a particular parish. But what they all have in common is a desire for the Church and its members to grow in holiness as a community that looks outward to the world. These plans represent much discussion and activity that has taken place during the last year, the first of our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. I am very grateful for the hard work that has been put in by so many of you. If we continue to look towards the future then we can be sure in the knowledge that our Church is alive, to quote Pope Benedict.

The season of Advent challenges us with a different idea of the future. This is a future that comes to us from God, not one that we can fully work out for ourselves. On the one hand we hear in the Scripture readings that we have to prepare a way for the Lord, and yet we are also taught that the Lord will come like a thief. At Christmas we can see how this works out in history. Although many of the Jewish people hoped for a Messiah and prepared for his coming, when he actually did come he was not what was expected. He was not the political or military leader who would free his people from oppression, but instead we were given a child in a manger who would free all people from sin. Our hopes and expectations always find satisfaction in Jesus. So Christmas for us is not just a celebration of a past event but also a sign of the future. We believe that Christ will come again, and as St. Peter tells us today, 'What we are waiting for is what he promised; the new heavens and new earth.'

We were reminded last year when the great Pope John Paul II inaugurated the Year of the Eucharist that through the sacrifice of Jesus we can celebrate both the presence of Christ and the promise of future glory. Our faith has been deepened through praying the Mass more devoutly and by worshipping the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It is in the Mystery of the Eucharist that we can hold together the two ideas of the future that we grapple with in Advent. Jesus reassures us with his presence as we prepare for our future. Yet we know that there will be time when that which we now know through

sign and sacrament will take on a different kind of reality when Christ comes in his glory.

Over the last year we have come to realise more than ever before that the Blessed Eucharist is always at the heart of our lives as Catholic Christians, that is why I ask you especially during Advent and at Christmas to pray for vocations to the priesthood. May I also ask you to encourage men who you think may have a vocation to think seriously about offering themselves to the Church as priests. There is no need for me to remind you that without priests we cannot have the Eucharist. What kind of church would we be without the Mass? Ultimately priests are a gift to the church. They are a gift from God and a self-giving of a person's life. Let us all pray most urgently that our diocese will be blessed by many more vocations to the priesthood so that we can prepare the way of the Lord.

I wish you a blessed and prayerful Advent season.

Your servant in Christ,

Malcolm McMahon OP  
Bishop of Nottingham