



**Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nottingham  
appointed to be read at all Masses  
on the Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time,  
Saturday 3 / Sunday 4 September 2011**

My dear friends,

There are two important events in the life of the Church this September which I want to speak to you about today.

You will have already noticed the first. This weekend, the revised English translation of the Roman Missal is being implemented in England & Wales. Although some of the words are new, and it will take us some time to get used to them, this gives us an opportunity to reflect upon our faith, and in particular on the great mystery which we celebrate at Mass.

As members of Christ's Body, the Church, we are a priestly people. 'Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them,' as we have just heard in today's Gospel, and it is our vocation to gather Sunday after Sunday in the presence of God, on behalf of the world, to celebrate Mass, the treasure at the heart of our life as Church. The Mass which we celebrate today is the same Mass which the Church has celebrated since the time of Christ himself, who gave us his Body and Blood at the Last Supper, commanding us to 'Do this in memory of me.'

After the Resurrection, Christ's first followers gathered together on Sundays to listen to the Word of God, offer prayers and break the bread. Whether Mass is celebrated in English or in Latin, in the largest cathedral or the smallest chapel, it is the centre of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each individual Christian. During Mass, God sanctifies the world in Christ: we see Christ in one another, and welcome

him into our very lives by listening attentively to the Scriptures and receiving his Body and Blood in Holy Communion. In the readings and the silence, the prayers and our singing, our faith is nourished, strengthened and expressed.

Here in the Diocese of Nottingham, we have been preparing for some time for the implementation of the new missal. Many of you will have been to one of the training days organised by the Liturgical Commission, or read information which has been published nationally and locally. Now it is time for us to begin using the new texts which the Church has given to us. I hope and pray that they will draw us ever more deeply into the mystery of God's love for us, so that the Mass may truly be the source and summit of our Christian life.

The second matter I would like to speak about is penitence, which is the spiritual disposition by which we all identify ourselves with Christ in his Passion and Death. Penitence is expressed in acts of penance, notably prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In prayer, we unite the sufferings and burdens which we bear in our daily lives with those which Christ experienced in his Passion. In fasting and abstinence, we die a little to self in order to grow closer in Christ. In almsgiving, we express our concern for and solidarity with the sufferings of Christ in those who are in need, especially the poor. All three forms of penitence constitute a vital part of Christian living. When this is visible, then it is also an important act of Christian witness.

The very heart of our lives as Catholics is our celebration of Mass. Our regular worship at Mass on Sundays – the day of the Lord's Resurrection – and on Holydays of Obligation, is the most powerful outward sign and witness of our faith in Jesus Christ to our family, friends and neighbours. However, as I have said, our celebration of Sunday Mass is the 'source and summit' of our lives as Catholics; it cannot ever become the 'be all and end all' of our faith, and we should seek to practise our faith in the week as on Sundays.

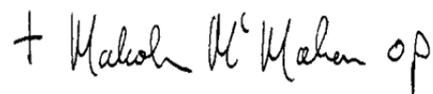
One way of doing this is penitence. Just as we mark the Lord's Resurrection in a special way, so too we ought to mark His Death on the Cross on Good Friday, and for this reason the Church sets aside every Friday as a day of penitence. The Bishops believe it is important that all the faithful be once more united in a common, identifiable act of Friday penance, because they recognise that the virtue of penitence is best acquired as part of a common resolve and common witness. I can remember when I was younger having to queue at the fish counter at work on a Friday – it was one of those things that marked me out as being a Catholic.

The law of the Church requires Catholics on Fridays to abstain from meat, or some other form of food, or to observe some other form of penance laid down by the Bishops' Conference. The Bishops of England & Wales, having consulted the faithful, have decided to re-establish the practice that Friday penance should be fulfilled by abstaining from meat and by uniting this to prayer. Those who cannot or choose not to eat meat as part of their normal diet should abstain from some other food of which they regularly partake. This will come into effect on Friday 16 September 2011, the anniversary of the arrival of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI for his Apostolic Visit to our country.

Fasting is common to all religious traditions. Although it has been possible in recent years to perform some other act of penance, many Catholics have continued to practise abstinence, and simple acts of witness, such as fasting, accompanied by sincere prayer, can be a powerful call to faith. Other things we do include saying grace before meals, making the Sign of the Cross when we pass churches, and making a special effort to attend Mass on weekdays. In our Diocese, I have encouraged everyone to pray the Angelus at midday. These traditional Catholic practices, including Friday penance, are straightforward actions which both dedicate certain moments in our daily lives to Almighty God and demonstrate our love and trust in his goodness and providence.

By our worthy celebration of the sacred liturgy and our daily acts of penitence, I hope that we will all be drawn closer to Christ as members of his Body, the Church.

With my prayers and kind wishes for you and your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Malcolm McMahon OP". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

**Right Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP**  
**Bishop of Nottingham**