



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

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Pastoral Letter
Fifth Sunday of Lent
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My dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

We will soon be celebrating Holy Week and thankfully this year we will do so as a worshipping community gathered in our various churches. Holy Week is a special time of grace. By reliving through the liturgy the events of the death and resurrection of the Lord, we draw strength and inspiration for our journey of faith both as individuals and as a Church community.

Of course the pandemic from which we have all suffered in the last year has made many feel vulnerable and frightened. Many of you I know have suffered bereavement as a result of this deadly virus and all of us have had to adapt to a new lifestyle in lockdown, which brings its own pressures and anxieties. The pandemic has changed the lives of all of us; it is not only a British disease but one which is being suffered over the globe by people of every faith and ethnicity. We are fortunate in this country to have such an efficient vaccination programme, to help us look forward to a brighter future. There are many in the world who do not have such a possibility so I hope that all of you will avail yourselves of the vaccine to bring the virus under control, not only for our own good but also for the common good of the whole of humanity. The fewer people with COVID-19 means the less it will spread. Please be responsible.

As we draw near to Easter we are also, please God, drawing closer to a return to a more normal way of life. We have yet to discover what our post pandemic life will be. We will need time to adapt, time to reflect and of course a time to recover from the trauma we have lived through. This will be a process in which we will engage on many levels in our own families, in our parishes and in civil society. It may be a long process; healing takes time.

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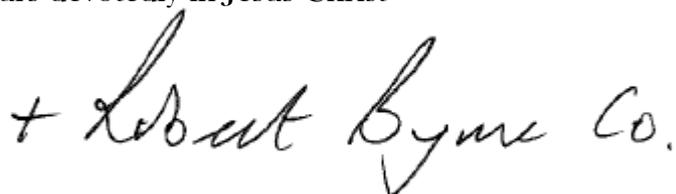
At the same time, we are certain in faith that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ brings us new life and hope. It is not just one event in human history among the many that have happened and are done with. The resurrection of Christ is that event which changes and redefines all the events of human history and gives a different meaning to everything. In Christ's resurrection everything has been transformed and reconfigured, reappraised and understood in a fundamentally new way. Today's Gospel sets the scene for the forthcoming drama of Holy Week. We hear that a final cosmic battle with Satan is about to begin. This battle will involve Christ's death, but that death will be unimaginably fruitful in defeating evil and granting his followers access to eternal life.

St John Henry Newman said: Christ came to gather together in one all the elements of good dispersed throughout the world, to make them his own, to illuminate them with himself, to reform and refashion them into himself. He came to make a new and better beginning of all things than Adam had been, and to be the fountain head from which all good might flow."

So we need to enter into the mystery of Easter if we are to lead an authentic Christian life. We do not make a merely intellectual response to our resurrection faith but live it day by day as a life changing event. How do we do that? Pope Francis says: we need "the ability to wonder, to contemplate; the ability to listen to the silence and to hear the tiny whisper amid the great silence by which God speaks to us." To enter into the mystery means going beyond our own comfort zones, beyond our apathy and indifference and to seek out that which is beautiful and true. A whole new set of possibilities are given to us through the power of the resurrection. New life, new vision, new beginnings are offered us and indeed the whole cosmos is healed and sanctified by the risen Christ. As we emerge from the pandemic, we place our trust in him who will show us new ways of living and give us new hope and a fresh vision so that we can rebuild our lives and reach out to those in any kind of need.

May I take this opportunity once more to thank our NHS workers and all those who are on the front line in the caring professions. We are deeply grateful to you. Thanks also to those volunteers who have worked hard to keep our churches open. Finally, I wish you all, your families and loved ones a blessed Holy Week and every joy of the Easter season.

Yours devotedly in Jesus Christ



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