

Pastoral Letter for the Fourth Sunday of Lent in 2019



Peter

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, AND FAVOUR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE, BISHOP OF WREXHAM

TO

THE CLERGY AND THE CONSECRATED AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

Health and Benediction in the Lord.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For anyone who is in Christ there is a new creation; ... It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ ...' (2Corinthians 5:17-18)

On this mid-point of the Lent season– ‘*Laetare Sunday*’ the Church puts before us again the reason to be joyful (*laetare*). This instruction is re-stated from the very first words of the liturgy, ‘Rejoice ... Be joyful ...’ proclaims the Entrance Antiphon.

Why?

Even before the Liturgy of the Word, the Collect prayer teaches us, ‘O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way ...’ It is as the Book of Joshua reminds us, God who takes away shame. S.Paul in writing to the Corinthians picks up that theme, our reconciliation in Christ and adds, that now ‘we are ambassadors for Christ.’ I will confine myself to two ways that we can genuinely make a contribution to the reconciling work of Christ in our individual lives, our parishes and the Diocese.

Firstly in the area of creation; before Christ the world was in a state of enmity with God. In Christ reconciliation came about between God and humanity and between members of God's family, but still we are have to work out the reconciliation between the Creator and the way we as stewards use creation. Simply, how are we looking after our world?

Pope Francis is leading the way in calling us to be aware of what we have done to our world and the certainty that, without immediate and sustained action, we will inflict irreparable damage on our planet which will adversely affect the lives of our children and our children's children. This is most certainly a matter which is rooted in our Faith. Creation is God's gift to us, in Christ we are a new creation and we are called to be faithful stewards of creation. Each one of us is to make those changes to our lives that further that reconciliation before we inflict irreparable damage on our planet which will adversely affect the lives of our children and our children's children. For all too long we have exploited our world and its resources, often in ignorance as to the consequences, but now we are no longer ignorant.

A great deal of difference can be made through a number of small actions in our personal lives. To name a few: We can shop more carefully, particularly choosing local produce, so saving the expensive transportation costs and use of fuel. We can cut the temperature on our central heating (perhaps wearing a pullover around our home). We can walk or cycle more and use less petrol, using public transport more regularly. We can turn lights off in unused rooms, hang washing out to dry rather than using energy-expensive drying machines. We can reduce the waste we make and recycle more. These may seem almost trivial but they are significant ways where we can make an impact for the good. We show the goodness of our faith by our actions.

On the Catholic Church's website www.cbcew.org.uk you will find a film-based resource entitled *Global Healing* to help us understand and to respond to the damage being done to our planet – our common home. It's for parishes, groups and individuals and aims to inform, challenge and equip people to engage with Pope Francis' vital call to Care for Our Common Home. I commend it to you.

The second area of particular current concern is that to do with the fallout around the whole Referendum issue, Brexit and its consequences. Never has a single issue caused so much division within our country, communities and families. Sadly not only have the issues caused difference of opinion but in some cases a complete break-down of reasoned argument and the rise in hateful and extremist and abusive words and deeds. The first century Corinthians were racked with dissension and confusion about their faith, necessitating Paul to write to correct and encourage them about the ideals they are to live up to. For our communities it is about whether we should be in or out of the EU; but S. Paul would say the same to us, that we are part of God's new creation and as such we are to be ambassadors for Christ: that is, we are sent on a mission to bring his reconciliation to the people our world. The task of the Church –each one of us individually and together- is to bring the benefits won by Christ to all people. Those benefits are forgiveness, peace and gift of being that new creation. The words of the prayer attributed to S. Francis are never so more appropriate to the needs of our countries as now:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled, as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is by losing that we find; it is by forgiving that we are forgiven and it is in dying that we rise again to eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Christ reconciliation comes about between God and humanity and between members of God's family.

Jesus was sensitive to the need of reconciliation within families as we heard in the Gospel reading – it is clearly there between the father and his younger son. More though is required to achieve reconciliation between the father and his oldest son as well as his reaction and attitude towards his young brother.

It is in the sacrament of Confession that we experience God reconciling us to himself through Christ in the deepest of ways. I am pleased many of you used the opportunity given during the 24 Hours for the Lord to experience that reconciling power of God and most grateful to the priests who made themselves available in the various centres to facilitate that reconciliation.

It only leaves me to invite you to the Chrism Mass on the Wednesday evening of Holy Week. During that Mass your priests will renew their priestly commitment and join with me in blessing and consecrating the Holy Oils that will be used at Easter and throughout the year in the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. At each we experience in its particular way the reconciling power of Christ.

In the meantime and to-day especially I wish you a joy filled Lord's Day as you rejoice in and celebrate your reconciliation with the Father in Christ. For mothers too I pray that you know joy, peace and blessing in your children.

Be assured of my continued prayers for you, your families and the Diocese especially in the coming days of Easter.

† Peter

Bishop of Wrexham

Given at Wrexham on the 29th March in the Year of our Lord 2019 and appointed to be read in the Churches and Chapels of the Diocese of Wrexham at all Masses of the Fourth Sunday of Lent 2019 and available in print form thereafter.