

Pastoral Letter 3rd Sunday of Lent, March 3rd 2024

My dear friends,

For those people who are preparing to become Catholics at Easter the journey continues. Although the end is in sight the last few steps can be the most difficult. Today the catechumens, that is those preparing for baptism, confirmation and eucharist will receive the Creed. They are reminded that the words of the Creed are few, but the mysteries are great. They are exhorted to receive them with a sincere heart and be faithful to them. Every Sunday when we recite the Apostles' creed or the Nicene creed, we should be doing the same, reaffirming our faith in our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus, and allowing those words and Jesus' Spirit to shape our lives. In doing this we are journeying with our new Catholics. Many of you are accompanying the catechumens and the adult candidates for confirmation in a direct way within your local RCIA groups but every one of us can accompany them in prayer and by living out our beliefs.

You will have heard the word 'accompaniment' very often during our own diocesan synod and in reports of the Synod which took place in Rome last October and which will continue in October this year. There are many examples of accompaniment already in the life of the church. Walking alongside people is very common in the life of the Church in Liverpool archdiocese. The process known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is one example that I have already referred to but other ministries in our parishes are also forms of accompaniment. Accompaniment means being there for people at different stages of life – in times of sorrow and joy. Accompaniment can awaken within these relationships a clear awareness of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

Families of Parishes, which have been formed in our archdiocese following our pastoral plan, can be seen as parishes accompanying each other to further the mission of the Church.

The Synod called for a renewal of structures of our parishes to make them radically mission oriented. Our goal is to make our parishes places where individuals and families can encounter Jesus anew, grow as disciples, work synodally and be equipped to accompany one another within our parish communities and beyond their boundaries.

As we accompany the catechumens approaching their baptism, we are reminded that in baptism, the risen Jesus shares his divine life with us, as well sharing with us the responsibility for the mission of the Church – his mission. Because of the dignity of our baptism, all of us carry the responsibility to help others encounter Christ, to walk together on the journey of faith, to proclaim the Gospel and to glorify God by our lives. This mission is larger than any one of us – or any one parish. This mission of Jesus, our mission, we fulfil together as members of the living Body of Christ, the Church.

My hope is that Families of Parishes will benefit from the shared gifts of people, time, talents, buildings and other resources so that we can truly renew parish life. We need every member of the Church to share their God-given gifts to build up the Body of Christ.

Let us dare dream for a moment. Imagine more young people on fire with the faith, more people encountering Christ in the sacraments, more robust outreach ministries serving those on the edge and churches that are full on Sundays to give praise and thanks to God. This is all possible, and I believe Families of Parishes is the key to making it happen.

All parishes of the Archdiocese of Liverpool will join other parishes to form Families of Parishes. Our mission hasn't changed, but how we approach that mission must shift in response to our circumstances. We must move forward together synodally with greater collaboration and better stewardship of our resources.

In the Gospel today Jesus shows us by his actions and words that salvation is revealed in him. His enigmatic saying about building the Temple anew in his body was at last understood by his disciples to mean the Temple that was his Body, the Church. Jesus was bold in his actions, and we must be like him. At the end of the Gospel today we are also told that Jesus also knows what is in our hearts. With this in mind, we should be encouraged as we take these bold steps forming families of parishes because our open hearts are filled with Jesus' Spirit.

At this time of year, I accompany the Catechumens and Candidates preparing for full communion by saying the following prayer. I invite you to join me to pray for them and our new Families of Parishes.

God our Father,
Through your mercy you have called us
To become your children.
Help us to walk with your Son through his passion,
death and resurrection so that by the power of the
Holy Spirit we may rise with him on Easter Day.
Show us your mercy and love every step throughout
our lives that we may grow in friendship with you,
now and forever,
Amen.

I wish you and your families every blessing as you continue your Lenten journey,

Malcolm McMahon OP, Archbishop of Liverpool