

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER
for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
12th January 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Preface of today's Mass offers us a clear reminder that the Lord Jesus has been sent by the Father to bring good news to the poor. Jesus, the Word made Flesh, God-with-us, was born among us so that all may have life. The good news of Salvation is, therefore, the message that the Church is tasked to bring to the whole world.

Just as the Holy Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism by John, "declaring Him" the Son of the Father, so the Holy Spirit dwells in those who are baptised, guiding the mission that is given to us all through our baptism – our sharing in the mission of the whole Church.

We are called to nothing less than living every moment of life caught up, as it were, in the love that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism brings us to life lived in the love of the Blessed Trinity. It opens for us the way to a relationship with God, in and through Christ, so close that nothing, as St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, can separate us from this love. Just as Isaiah states in the first reading today, the Lord gathers us in His arms, carries us close to Him and cares for us with the greatest gentleness.

Baptism opens for us the way to the other Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. Let us not forget that there is nothing more wonderful in this life than our meeting with the Lord in the Eucharist, as he nourishes us with Himself – He who is the Bread of Life.

All is gift: life in the love of the Blessed Trinity, closeness to the person of Jesus, the abiding presence in our lives of the Holy Spirit who prompts our actions and prays within us when we cannot find the words. So much is given that we cannot fully describe its wonder. As Jesus reminds us, to those who are given much, much is expected.

How, then, are we called to respond to God's gift? As Christ offered Himself, must we not offer ourselves to be the Lord's instruments in bringing good news to the poor?

As the Church we must witness to the good news in an ever-changing world and each and every living stone in the spiritual house that is the Church must take their place in this mission.

In this Jubilee Year, the Holy Father has called us to be Pilgrims of Hope. Our Hope is the Kingdom to which we look forward and it is this Hope, grounded in Faith and expressed also in Love, that is the Christian's Mission – our gift to the world. It is nothing less than the proclamation of the Kingdom of Christ Himself.

This year is also the 60th Anniversary of our Diocese – surely a favourable time for us all to pray for increased openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our commitment to share the Good News of the Kingdom.

This call to mission is at the very heart of our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Since Easter last year, conversations have been taking place in each of our present deaneries, setting our communities on the path to new expression, to a renewed journey of prayer, formation and mission that we may truly live as communities of saints – living in Hope, Faith and Love in proclamation of Christ Who is our Way.

There is much in these conversations, it is true, that is about structure. While this is necessary, we must not allow ourselves to be absorbed solely in these matters. The renewal of our parish structures is for the very purpose of enabling us all – lay faithful, religious, deacons, priests and bishop – to take our proper place in the great mission that the Lord has given to us.

Ever-deeper conversation and sharing across our communities, together with a sharing of resources will, in time, open the way to renewed mission as our focus shifts to greater cooperation and effectiveness in the proclamation of the Good News.

The new model of parish will enable us to live as “communities of communities” – bringing strength and renewed life as communities join together in prayer, in formation and in the mission that will develop from these foundations.

These initial steps may not always be easy. We must learn to work together in new ways and I take this opportunity to thank those priests who have accepted the leadership role of moderator. I ask everyone to allow them the time and give them and the clergy teams the support they will need for these early stages in this new way of living out our mission.

There will be much work ahead, especially for moderators and the clergy and lay faithful who will be called to serve on leadership teams. Let us all come together in our “communities of communities” for prayer, formation and the renewed mission for the world the Lord calls us to serve.

With every Blessing,

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