

Pastoral Letter to be read at all Masses in the Archdiocese of Liverpool
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 20th/21st October 2018

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last month the Bishops of England and Wales went to Rome for a visit and pilgrimage known as the Ad Limina Apostolorum (to the Threshold of the Apostles). Every seven or eight years or so each national hierarchy is called to Rome to give an account of what they are doing. It is not just reporting to the Pope and the heads of Vatican departments, it is also an opportunity to listen to each other. The different departments of the Vatican listened to us. Pope Francis listened to us too, and of course we listened to him.

This listening is at the heart of his authority. It is the way Pope Francis lives out one of the titles of the Pope – the servant of the servants of God. It is sometimes hard to imagine the Pope as a servant, even Pope Francis who has done away with much of the trappings that surround the Pope – but that is what he is, a servant. That is something of what Jesus was talking about in the Gospel today. He was saying that people in authority are to be servants of His people. True authority is lived out in service and that turns the way the world thinks on its head. Jesus saw authority as a way of service, to promote the good of others rather than to promote one's own honour and glory. This is at the very heart of all our Christian service, as we each try to imitate Jesus in our daily lives.

The only way I can live out my calling to service as your Archbishop is by listening. I need to hear the hopes and fears of our people, the challenges facing our priests and deacons, our schools, and the reality our families have to deal with each day. I have decided to call a Synod to help us to meet some of the pressing issues that we face at this time in the life of the Archdiocese. How are we to witness to the Gospel message of God's love in a culture that seems to have little room for faith? How can we better organise our resources of priests, deacons, people, buildings so that we can become the Church that God is calling us to be? How can we best support the work of Catholic education so we pass on our faith to the next generation? How can our Catholic lives be better supported by the ministries of the Church?

The word Synod means "Together on the Way". The Synod is a moment when together we can choose a path to walk on, guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit who will speak to us. The Synod is not just another meeting. It is a journey. We have just had a year of prayer which reached its climax for us in the Eucharistic Congress. Over the next two years we will be trying to discover the will of God through listening and learning. The voice of each one of us needs to be heard. Parishes and pastoral areas will be invited to choose members for the Synod. I hope that there will be many different opportunities for all of our people to share their hopes, their fears and their dreams of the way the Holy Spirit is at work among us to bring fresh life into our Church.

In October 2020 our Archdiocese – priests and people together – will meet to reflect on what we have heard and vote on specific proposals that have arisen from the discussion and sharing in our parishes and pastoral areas. I have decided to work in this way because we believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in the bishops, priests and people of the Archdiocese. So, I need each one of you to play your part in our Synod process. Without you, we will not hear the call of God guiding us and walking with us on our journey.

You will be given the chance to learn more about the Synod in the months to come. There is a leaflet available today which is for all of us. Please do your best to pass a copy of this leaflet on to people who may not get one from Church. The leaflet has an invitation to a meeting near you to tell you more about the Synod and how we can get involved.

I will officially convene the Synod at a special service in the Cathedral on Sunday 3 February next year. All five hundred members of the Synod will be present at this service. From here they will be sent out to do

their work of listening, reflecting and discerning, supported by the prayers of all of us. I need your help so that we can truly be a Church that listens. We all have members of our families, neighbours and friends who are Catholics, but have little contact with our parishes. Is it possible for us to listen to their experiences and their needs so that we can be a Church that serves them too? We are going to try to listen to our young people, to families with children, to those who work in our schools. What will our Church be like for them in twenty or thirty years' time? We want to hear the experiences of those who may have made their home in our parishes only recently and to learn how we can welcome them in a better way. In all this listening and learning, let's pray that we might hear a call from God to change, to try to be His Church in a new way.

The letter to the Hebrews, our second reading today, speaks to us of God who walks with us; a High Priest who feels our weaknesses with us. It speaks of the power of prayer, reminding us that we never approach the throne of God in vain. As we prayed in the Psalm today: 'May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you.'

Today is also World Mission Day. We are invited to reflect on the call of God to be His missionary disciples. God's gifts are not given to us to be hoarded but to be shared. Please keep in your prayer the work of all those who seek to share the Gospel message across the world.

Today, with real enthusiasm in my heart, I invite you all to join in the journey which will enable us to become the Church that God is calling us to be – that is our Synod 2020 journey!

Most Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP

Archbishop of Liverpool