

**Pastoral Letter of the
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent
Saturday 21 / Sunday 22 February 2015**

Dear friends in Christ,

This Sunday, in Saint Barnabas' Cathedral, I will be meeting all the people from across our Diocese who will be baptised or received into the full communion of the Catholic Church this year. The Rite of Election is an important event in the annual life of our Diocese; it reminds us that God has elected, or chosen, us to share in the new life that Jesus won for us in his Death and Resurrection. We share in that life in Baptism, that great sacrament in which we are consecrated by the Father to fulfil Christ's mission for us as Prophet, Priest and King, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our First Reading and Second Reading at Mass this morning speak of the effect of Baptism. Following the Great Flood, God told Noah that 'the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh' (*Gen 9:15*), the rainbow being a sign of God's Covenant with his people that he would never again wreak destruction in his Creation; in Baptism, 'a pledge made to God from a good conscience' (*1 Pet 3:21*), water is the means by which we are given life not death, justified not destroyed; washed free from sin, we are given the grace to walk in newness of life. God has made a new Covenant with each and every one of us, not sealed with a rainbow but in the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ who is alive at the heart of his Church.

Our catechumens, those who are preparing for Baptism, will themselves soon share in this Covenant. But as we accompany all who are to join our Catholic family in the coming weeks with our prayers, this holy season of Lent is a good opportunity for us to reflect on our own need to convert to Christ. Conversion is not a 'one off'

experience, but a daily, on-going requirement for those who wish to follow Christ more fully in their daily lives, even those of us who were baptised many years ago; in Jesus' words (*Lk 9:23-24*):

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, that man will save it.

This Lent gives us the opportunity for us to renounce ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Jesus through the penitential disciplines which Jesus himself spoke of in the Gospel reading that we heard on Ash Wednesday.

By fasting, by 'giving up something for Lent', we renounce ourselves and identify with the poor and the suffering in our world. Most of us think of fasting in terms of food, especially and rightly Friday abstinence; however, fasting need not just be giving up food, since a fast is more than a simple diet. We could try to live without something which assumes a greater importance in our lives than it should; walk up stairs instead of taking the lift at work; talk to one another or read the Bible instead of watching our favourite TV programme; or offer a friend or neighbour a lift to church on a Sunday instead of coming by ourselves. There are lots of creative ways in which we can renounce ourselves and put God first in our lives.

By prayer, we seek to discover God's call for us even more profoundly by raising our mind and heart to God. As Christians, we should be people who worship God not just in church on a Sunday but in every aspect of our lives. So, I hope that this Lent we will find time to pray more, especially in the morning and at night, and to read the Scriptures more frequently. Maybe we could make a special effort to go to Mass on a weekday as well as on Sunday, attend the Stations of the Cross in church, or say the Rosary, either on our own or with our families

By almsgiving, we seek to share God's love with our brothers and sisters, whoever they may be. Again, we can do this in various ways, such as taking part in CAFOD's Lent fast day; but maybe this year we could give alms in terms of our time, by visiting a housebound parishioner or neighbour, by joining a Catholic organisation such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul, or by making the effort to get in touch with a relative or friend we haven't seen for a while.

These are practical ways of living the Christian life. But there is one last thing that I would like to commend to you this Lent, and that is the sacrament of reconciliation. St Paul teaches us that 'we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal that we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God' (*2 Cor 5:20*). Lent gives us the perfect opportunity to seek

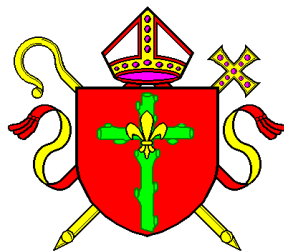
reconciliation with God and with one another, and there is no better way for us to abandon ourselves into God's hands by handing over our sins to him who has redeemed us from them by making a good confession. The Lord is waiting for us – all we have to do is approach him with the same open hands and open heart with which he welcomes us. And as 'ambassadors for Christ', we can set an example to our brothers and sisters, especially those who do not celebrate Mass as frequently as they could, particularly by inviting them to join us at Mass and confession.

I hope and pray that all of us, whether we are preparing to be baptised or received into the full communion of the Catholic Church or whether we have been living our faith on a daily basis for many years, will give time to the Lord this Lent in fasting, prayer and almsgiving, and in particular by seeking the Lord's forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. By doing this, we will heed Jesus' injunction in today's Gospel to 'Repent, and believe the good news' (*Mk 1:15*), and be ready to celebrate his Death and Resurrection in Holy Week with minds and hearts renewed.

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families for a blessed Lent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Mc Govern". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Rev Mgr Canon Thomas McGovern Prot Ap
Diocesan Administrator of the Diocese of Nottingham



**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

February 2015