



*Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of England and Wales
For Home Mission Sunday
20th September 2015*

Today is Home Mission Sunday and to emphasise its importance this pastoral letter comes to you on behalf of all the Bishops of England and Wales together.

This day is the moment when we invite every member of the Catholic community to pray for, participate in and support the work of evangelisation in England and Wales. This is our task of deepening, sharing and proclaiming our faith, sensitively and confidently, wherever we may be.

In July a national conference took place in Birmingham at which representatives of every Diocese looked at this task of spreading the Gospel message. At *Proclaim '15* many practical ideas were explored and exchanged. These are now available for your consideration. Our hope is that every parish will look at these suggestions and take up one or two of them, chosen according to your own circumstances. Our initiative has this theme: building missionary parishes. This is so important as the challenges to faith today are many and deep-rooted.

Pope Francis shows us that the true heart of faith is hugely attractive. He shows us how to let our faith be seen. He does this by making clear the great mercy of God, the mercy that he has received and that he shows to all.

The mercy of God is God's love in action, reaching out to every person, to each one of us in our weakness. Mercy is God's tender embrace in lifting us up and inviting us to start again. In the Psalm of our Mass today, we proclaimed God's mercy with the words: "*The Lord upholds my life.*" Mercy appears all the more clearly when, recognising our own sinfulness, we rely totally and joyfully on the goodness of God. When Pope Francis was asked to describe himself he said, simply, "I am a sinner."

As we understand the depth of God's never-failing mercy towards us, then we are freed to offer the same mercy to those around us. In doing so we show forth the best of our faith.

Our response to Pope Francis is to make the task of proclaiming God's mercy the priority in our own efforts. This we will strive to do most especially during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, established by Pope Francis, beginning this December. He writes: "*How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone.*" (*Misericordiae Vultus* 5) So we ask your help. Together let us Proclaim God's Mercy.

The readings we have heard today speak of the tests and trials of everyday life, the weariness we can feel, the conflicts we face, whether within our own hearts or from those around us. St James invites us to respond to every situation as peacemakers. That is easier said than done! But then he tells us that our way forward is through prayer, asking the Lord for all that we need to get through the day and to let his love be seen.

The Gospel Reading from St Mark puts it very simply. When we live our lives with trust in God as a child trusts his parents, then we will be free of so many burdens. And then our faith will be transparent, evident to others in all its attractiveness. Then we will be proclaiming the Gospel for others to see and hear.

The key, then, to showing our faith in the way we live is to be ready to live constantly in the presence of God, knowing that God never takes his eyes off us, not to catch us out, but because he loves us so much. When we are constantly aware of that loving gaze which is upon us, and of the mercy and encouragement that flows our way, then we are enabled to look on others in the same way.

These are the foundations of evangelisation. On them, other steps can be built: the opportunity to speak about our faith; the expression of that love in programmes of action towards those most in need; a loving care for those who have been hurt by life and hurt within the Church, for whom any return to the practice of their faith is particularly difficult. In this effort for evangelisation we seek out ways of accompanying others, through friendship, through prayer, through conversation, so that they sense in us the welcome that God most certainly extends to them. Our efforts need not be complicated or heroic. As Our Blessed Lady reminds us, through our humble efforts the Lord can do great things!

Finally, we your bishops want to thank each and every one of you for the witness that you already give. Your presence at Mass today is a good example. By coming to Mass you not only give due worship to God but also publicly proclaim your faith to everyone who knows of your commitment and routine. We thank you for your daily efforts in family living, the patterns of family life that you work hard to sustain. The family is the first and best school of faith, of prayer and of virtuous living. Thank you all indeed!

Together let us seek to live out the words of Pope Francis: *“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation marked by this joy.”* (Evangelii Gaudium, 1)

With all good wishes and prayers,



✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
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