



**Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney
Bishop of Nottingham**

**Lenten Pastoral Letter appointed to be read out at all Masses celebrated on
Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd March 2019**

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**“The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple
will always be like his teacher.” (Luke 6: 40)**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You will recall that, in the Autumn, I outlined three spiritual themes as a foundation for everything that we wish to do as a diocese over the next three years, in our schools, parishes, and chaplaincies: ‘Encounter’, which we began to explore during Advent, ‘Discipleship’, which we are about to explore during Lent, and ‘Missionary Discipleship’, which we will explore during Eastertide. School resources and Parish resources for Lent have been prepared and sent out, so I just wish to mention three aspects of discipleship that you might find helpful to reflect upon this Lent.

The first essential element of discipleship is, as we began to explore last Advent, time spent with Christ, so as to discover more deeply both his love for each one of us and his desire that we grow in our personal relationship with him. I find it significant that John begins his gospel with the account of Jesus inviting the two disciples of John the Baptist to come and spend time with him (John 1: 36-39). It points us to the truth that it’s as a consequence of time spent with Jesus in personal prayer, Eucharistic Adoration or reading the scriptures, that we come to discover more and more, both who he is and what he is asking of each of us; how he invites us to follow in his footsteps, to be his disciples. Christ Jesus is constantly inviting us to be his disciples, his co-workers, in and through the ordinary daily circumstances of our lives, in our home, our school, our parish, our place of work, and our wider neighbourhood. St Teresa of Avila expressed this very simply and beautifully when she said:

‘Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he walks to do good; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.’

So, a disciple is someone who wishes not only to grow in their relationship with Christ, but also to be used by Christ as a way in which his love, care, compassion, healing, blessing and forgiveness can be shared with others. The disciple is someone who is trying each day to move from a ‘me-centred’ relationship with Christ, to one that seeks to hear and respond to what Christ may be asking of them: ‘Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will’ (Psalm 40). David Wells told us, in the recent parish representative’s sessions we had with him on ‘Discipleship & Missionary Discipleship’, of how a young woman, very committed to the idea of being Christ’s disciple, would begin her day with this simple prayer: ‘What are we going to do, today, Lord?’ (repeat) She then asked Christ to help her to see that day, with his eyes; to see little opportunities when she could put her discipleship into action. So, for example, as she travelled in on the bus to work she would say a little prayer for the people sitting or standing immediately around her; that God would bless their day; that they might come to know how much Christ loved each of them. Perhaps this Lent we might all approach the start of each day in that way; asking Christ to help us to see opportunities, throughout the day, when we can be his eyes, his hands, his feet, in our Christ-like response, as his disciples, to those around us.

Secondly, a disciple is also someone who, through prayer, knows that that they often fall short of what Christ wants for them. The Season of Lent is a grace-filled time of renewal; we begin on Ash Wednesday with the invitation to ‘Repent and believe the Gospel’, and throughout Lent we are encouraged to acknowledge that there are things in all of our lives that we need to let go of, because they prevent us from being the disciple that Christ is calling each of us to be. So disciples of Christ are grateful recipients of God’s merciful forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so that they in turn may become instruments of that mercy and forgiveness to others. Please, especially if you haven’t been for a while, do make use of the opportunities this Lent provides to make a good Confession. It is, after all, the sacrament of God’s merciful love, and it brings us much healing and spiritual strength. Fasting and almsgiving are also good ways to grow in discipleship; to put what we have into God’s service by offering it up for the benefit of others. And at the end of Lent, in the Renewal of Baptismal Promises at Easter, we are given the opportunity to recommit ourselves as Christ’s disciples.

Thirdly, Christ is actually calling all his disciples to holiness of life, in and through the daily circumstances of our lives; to open our hearts and lives more and more to God, who alone is holy and so is the source of holiness: ‘Be holy for I am holy’ (Leviticus 11: 44). This is truly what God asks of us! Pope Francis teaches us this in his Exhortation ‘Rejoice and be glad’, that it is in and through our baptism and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we are each called by God to holiness of life.

This Exhortation is very easy to read and most encouraging, so it would be a good document to study individually, or with others, during Lent. The parish Lent resource pack offers helpful guidelines as to how this might be done, as well as much other useful material.

May this Lent be a most fruitful time of growth in discipleship for each of you, and for your parish (chaplaincy) community. You are in my prayers, please keep me in yours as we walk together in Christ's footsteps towards Easter.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Patrick

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Bishop's House - Nottingham
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