



## A Lenten Pastoral Letter

### *On our Christian Struggle*

To be read at all Masses on the First Sunday of Lent

26<sup>th</sup> February 2023

*“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”<sup>i</sup>. Hearing these words, we are moved by the realisation that our Lord goes into the wilderness for us. There, He confronts the deceptions which have afflicted humanity from the dawn of history<sup>ii</sup>. The Holy Spirit now leads us into the days of Lent to renew our struggle against deceptive spirits and the very father of lies<sup>iii</sup>; against our proud delusions and inclination to seek easy ways; and whatever comes before worshipping and serving the Lord God alone<sup>iv</sup>.*

The Second Vatican Council taught us with stirring words that, in this fallen world we find ourselves in a scene of battle where we must continuously strive, aided by God’s grace, to do what is right - often at much cost to ourselves<sup>v</sup>. It would not merely be naive; it would be disastrous to think we could live the Christian life and be a faithful Catholic today without engaging in this struggle. Yet, we take courage that Christ has won the victory and gifted His Church with all the grace and truth necessary for salvation.

Each year at the beginning of Lent, I have the joy of meeting adults from around the Diocese, people drawn from different age groups and backgrounds, who are preparing to be Baptised or received into full communion with the Catholic Church. I have no need to speak to them about *becoming* a Catholic because your witness and example has led them to this great discovery. Instead, I reflect with them on how *to live* as Catholics in the spiritual struggle which marks every Christian life; and I share with them three directions for the road ahead which are the vital *signs of life* that we are living as a Catholic Christian:

The first is **Mass every Sunday**. By putting the Mass first in our lives and literally first in our week, we recognise in the miracle of love which is the Eucharist that we must live *“by every word that comes from the mouth of God”<sup>vi</sup>*. For the Mystery of the Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, Christ Himself<sup>vii</sup>. Saint John Paul II once asked, *“Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we ever overcome our own deficiency?”* For in this Sacrifice and Sacrament our hearts are moved to adoration and unbounded love<sup>viii</sup>.

**The second vital sign of life is to regularly confess our sins** in the Sacrament of our conversion after Baptism which we call *Penance* and *Reconciliation*. In the face of every weakness and sin, we find grace and mercy in this Sacrament which Christ entrusted to His Church and place our trust in the help of God's grace as we set out anew on the path to holiness. In this way, we will always be converts!

**The third is making time for prayer each day**, making use of this wondrous gift to raise our mind and heart to God. Saint Teresa of Avila described the extraordinary gift of prayer as "*Nothing else than a close sharing between friends*"<sup>ix</sup>. Prayer is simple and yet difficult, for it involves a battle to give time when other priorities seem more pressing. In prayer we also confront our own illusions of self-reliance as we open our hearts to all the graces God wishes to give us<sup>x</sup>.

The Christian life demands much: not least, in the practice of charity in fulfilling our daily duties and the supreme charity of winning others for Christ and His Church. Yet, without daily prayer, frequent Confession and the Holy Eucharist at the centre of our lives, how could we ever hope to share Christ's victory? During these days of Lent, may we learn the vital lesson given by Jesus Himself when He says: "*Without me you can do nothing*"<sup>xi</sup>.

May Lent be blessed for us all in rediscovering this vital truth and renewing our Christian struggle with joy.

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

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<sup>i</sup> Mt. 4:1

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 539

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. CCC 2852

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Mt. 4:10

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Gaudium et Spes No. 37

<sup>vi</sup> Mt. 4:4

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis No. 5

<sup>viii</sup> Ecclesia De Eucharistia Nos. 62 & 60

<sup>ix</sup> Book of Her Life 8,5

<sup>x</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 2752

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. Jn. 15:5