



Pastoral Letter for the Fifth Sunday of Lent
To be read at all Masses on
25/26 March 2023

My dear friends in Jesus Christ,

As we move toward the end of Lent and are very aware of the difficult situations across our world and close at home, we receive a Gospel full of hope and encouragement.

St John gives us seven miracles in his Gospel – today's miracle is the climax and the greatest of all the miracles of Jesus. Bread is all right, but we get hungry again. Wine is fine, but we get thirsty after a while. Healing the sick is marvellous, but we still die.

The astounding message of the Gospel today is that Jesus is not only master of hunger, thirst, and illness, but even of death itself.

And as the Gospel today points out to us, God's care does not stop at death. All those who witnessed the raising of Lazarus could see that God's care and love did not end with the stopping of the pulse, it was stronger than death. We are invited to believe that as well. That is why we use the words from the Gospel so often at funeral services: I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, they will never die.

We live in a world where death is talked about more than life, a world dominated by death. For us Christians there are still tears at death, but we have the message of hope as well. Jesus, we are told loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus - he cried on being told about the death of his friend. Tears at death are natural and right. But we must not stop there. Death would seem to be an end, final. But this idea is challenged and changed in the Gospel today. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus the finality of death has disappeared and something greater and grander is born.

Jesus was promising another kind of life - for which death was a preparation. Death is not an end, a finality, but the condition of passing into another kind of life, which is unbounded, has no limitations, eternal life with God.

Today, I want to give you a few details of the progress of our Pastoral Plan since the Synod. Things are happening – they take time and often it takes longer than we imagine. But we do not lose hope. I am encouraged by the work that is being done in the Deanery Synodal Councils and in the development of families of parishes. This is a sign of hope. The constitution of our Archdiocesan Synodal Council has been agreed and it will now begin its progress towards its first meeting later this year. The new Advisory Body I am in the process of setting up includes men and women. I will get advice from a much wider group made up of people from across the Archdiocese. Because of the Pastoral Plan we are looking towards a new work forming young adults for leadership and lay ministry across the Archdiocese. But one area which I am delighted to report on is the work that has been done in “becoming a Church that cares for its priests”.

When the Synod met on 20 June 2021, the Apostolic Nuncio delivered a greeting from the Holy Father which included this:

“Please don’t forget your priests and bishops in your prayers, in your suggestions and in your practical support. Remember that they are human beings in one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Church. Take care of the pastor who has a responsibility for the local community. Accompany them with love, patience, friendship, and support.”

These concerns found their place in the Synod recommendations. There was a clear affirmation of the need to assist priests, both personally and in their ministry as they work with one another and in collaboration with the people of God. A question that was asked was how can we better support our priests?

The Pastoral Plan envisaged an externally facilitated process which explored what needs to be developed to support priests to flourish in the “human, spiritual, liturgical, theological, intellectual and pastoral aspects of their lives.” At the core of this was a process of listening to the experiences of all the priests. What were early hopes and expectations of priesthood? How does this compare to now? What experiences have led the priests of the Archdiocese of Liverpool to live and work in the way they do today?

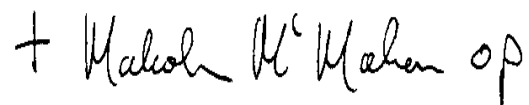
The process that the vast majority of priests took part in showed that they have a joy in serving in the Archdiocese. The reality is that some of the priests have low morale, and face some unrealistic expectations from both within and outside the Church. In years to come the number of priests available for ministry will be greatly reduced. In the light of this, the process has begun to enable the priests to look at the possibilities of doing things differently.

In their confidential conversations and discussions five pathways have emerged for ongoing reflection covering the areas of fraternity, ways of working, safeguarding, wellbeing, and issues around the possibility of flexible retirement. The priests have agreed a summary of these conversations to be shared with all in the Archdiocese. This is available today.

My hope is that the first meeting of the Archdiocesan Synodal Council will reflect on the ongoing implementation of the Pastoral Plan including the work that has begun in the area of care for priests. There will be opportunities in the months to come for you to make your voice heard.

By his death and resurrection Jesus offered to those who believe the reality of new life. And the truth is that eternal life doesn't just begin at death...it begins at the moment when we say: "Yes Lord I believe".

With best wishes and prayers to you and your families.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Malcolm McMahon OP". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev Malcolm McMahon OP
Archbishop of Liverpool

Archbishop's House
Liverpool L19 0PH