

## **A PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER**



### **FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY FAMILY 2024**

**APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS  
IN THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 29th DECEMBER 2024.**

My dear people,

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has announced a Year of Jubilee. In communion with him, as the Successor of Saint Peter, we joyfully join the Universal Church as Pilgrims of Hope. Here in Lancaster Diocese, we add to our celebrations the marking of our own Centenary celebrations, already begun. It is to be a year of Grace in which Christ is our clear focus. I commend to you and your clergy the Bull of Indiction entitled, 'Spes Non Confundit' (Hope does not disappoint). It is a rich source of inspiration for meditation and homilies that we can use throughout the whole course of the year. The Holy Year will conclude on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026, the Solemnity of the Epiphany.

A key image for every Jubilee Year is the Holy Door. Each cathedral throughout the world will identify one of its points of entry as a Holy Door, a symbolic point of pilgrimage by which we express, without complication, our desire to enter more deeply into the Mystery of life with God. That life is no abstract thing: it takes flesh in the heart and person of Jesus Christ, sent by the Father and born of Mary.

To help share this Grace two further places of pilgrimage have been chosen within the Diocese: St Mary's, Cleator and St Mary's, Ladyewell, Fernyhalgh. I ask the clergy and parishioners of these two parishes, together with the clergy and Faithful of our Cathedral, to do all they can to welcome and encourage pilgrims and visitors. Be generous in keeping the churches open for personal prayer. Hospitality shown to strangers is something dear to the heart and ministry of Christ.

The symbol of the Holy Door will be with us for the year. It is an image rich in spiritual meaning. We recall how Jesus identified Himself as the door, 'I am the door. If anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.' (John 10:9).

Each month during the course of the year I intend to write a short reflection on this theme, sharing it with parishes and Religious communities and hopefully more widely through the Diocesan website. Already, a number of themes come to mind. Jesus stands at our door and knocks, waiting for our response. Jesus reprimands the Pharisees because they obstruct the people from entering through God's door and fail to go in themselves. Jesus instructs us to pray by entering a private place within ourselves and, shutting the door, pray to the Father in that secret place. A friend of mine who had both his legs amputated recently spoke to me of the difficulty he has experienced accessing shops and offices. We must keep in mind what we take for granted whilst others struggle. I think of the confessional too. As a parish priest, over

the years, I became aware of how difficult it was for a penitent to enter the confessional. Before they began to try and made a good (or even bad) confession they had already said so much simply by walking through that door. It may be that you have your own 'holy door' reflections. It would be good to find ways of sharing them.

Let me now turn to what must be the most important point: the actual purpose of all this. Why should we bother? It is a question that deserves an answer, and for which we have an answer. The fundamental purpose is to draw each of us closer to Our Blessed Lord. Let us remember that He was also tempted by the same question, and at the very moments of His ministry when He experienced failure and discouragement. There are always good, sound, sensible reasons for giving up. We must arm ourselves with better reasons for persevering. And the best of these is to see in Jesus someone who persevered to the end. As he asked His disciples, He also asks each of us, 'What about you, will you also leave me?' I find that a deeply moving question, a challenge to look into the heart of Jesus.

We have now begun the Holy Year, a year to put away our false hopes in exchange for the Hope that is Jesus. It can be a year of new understanding as we learn, for example, what indulgencies are and how they work, why they remain relevant even after the Reformation! It can be a year of true healing, forgiveness, growth in knowledge of the Faith and confidence in the habit of prayer. It can be a year of formation for each of us irrespective of age, health, past failures, but we need to enter into it!

I pray that this will be a good year for each of you – but that does not mean it will be an easy year. Grace does not seem to work like that. But Jesus assures us that our efforts will be generously rewarded beyond all we can imagine. May it be a year in which you become even more aware of how much you are loved by the Father, how deeply you are valued.

We begin the year in the company of the Holy Family, invited into their home, present even in the crude environment of the stable. May Mary, Mother of the Good Shepherd, and Saint Joseph, Guardian of the Holy Family, be daily at your side sharing with you the gift of Jesus, her son and his stepchild. Mary is the disciple who knows Him best of all. Let us learn from her example how we can love Him more.

With my blessing for each of you and your families, especially for those of you whose needs are greatest at this time.

+ Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick  
**Bishop of Lancaster**