

Pastoral Letter for the First Sunday of Advent 2023



Peter

BY THE GRACE OF GOD, AND FAVOUR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE, BISHOP OF WREXHAM

TO

THE CLERGY AND THE CONSECRATED AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

Health and Blessing in the Lord.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**Visit this vine and protect it,
the vine your right hand has planted,**

(Psalm 79:14b-15a)

are words we prayed a few moments ago and they put me in mind of Jesus' own: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ... every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit." (John 15:1-2) As a metaphor for the Church these two passages clearly remind us that the Church is not of our making, it is Christ's; and that it is his to be changed and formed for the times and place in which it has life. The Church of Wrexham is one such place or part of the vine and now is a time that demands of us all change in order that we might face the challenges of the present as well as to grow into the future and again in the words of Jesus a little later in S. John's Gospel; "... that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (15:11)

As we embark upon a new year in the liturgical life of the Church, with a growing expectation in joy of the celebration of our Lord and Saviour's coming we acknowledge that the world is changed and continues to change as our

lives embrace more deeply the reality of the incarnation and the mystery of the Word of God made man and living among us (cf. Jn.1:1-14), as we will hear proclaimed again on Christmas morning.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation '*Verbum Domini – On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*': "The church is built upon the word of God. She is born from and lives that word." (N.3). Not only is the Church built upon the word of God; the life of each believer is sustained and nourished by that word proclaimed both in personal prayer and devotion. It is in responding to God's word that the quality of our life and ultimately our complete union with Jesus Christ depends. It is in the holy communion we make and receive during Mass that we are truly nourished as members of the Body of Christ and grow more and more into the Body of Christ.

The challenge that currently has to be faced by us all is that the human and temporal resources of the Diocese are fully stretched as I reported recently at the Clergy and Parish Finance Committee meeting and also in my updated pastoral plan – 'Into the Future -3' (November 2023) that will be available on the Diocesan website or from your parish. I also refer to this in the December edition of *Clarion*. Additionally I plan to have a number of consultation meetings around the Diocese in February after which I will have to make those decisions that are necessary for the future of the Diocese.

I ask that the inspiring words of S. Thérèse of Lisieux be our prayer and on our lips too, "It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to love."

'Confidence, "nothing but confidence" is the sole path that leads us to the Love that grants everything. With confidence, the wellspring of grace overflows into our lives, the Gospel takes flesh within us and makes us channels of mercy for our brothers and sisters. It is confidence that sustains us daily and will enable us to stand before the Lord on the day when he calls us to himself.' writes P.Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation celebrating the birth of S. Thérèse. (*C'est la Confiance. On confidence in the merciful love of God. October 2023*) (N.2-3)

Although S. Thérèse lived at a different time, in a different place and with a different vocation, her commitment of discipleship to Jesus and her zeal for the missionary life of the Church remain an example for us to follow; sharing both the merciful love of the father for his [prodigal] sinful son and the love of the Good Shepherd for the sheep who were lost, went astray and wounded. (cf. N.9)

As we light the four candles of the Advent wreath in our churches and our homes there is the invitation to pray in turn in *hope*, with *joy*, for *peace* and in *love*. Those gifts both bring us to Christ the Light of the World and enlighten our lives with the growing light of understanding and wisdom for the necessary pruning that must take place for the growth and bearing fruit of the vine of which we are part and in which we will find the fulness of joy.

I take this opportunity to wish you a holy and peaceful Advent as you prepare for the joyous celebration of our Saviour's birth. Be assured of my continued prayer for you and our Diocese.

† Peter

Bishop of Wrexham

Given at Wrexham on the 30th November in the Year of our Lord 2023 and appointed to be read in the Churches and Chapels of the Diocese of Wrexham at all Masses of the First Sunday Advent 2023, and available in print form and online thereafter.