

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



*✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



Pastoral Letter
To be read in all Parishes
2nd Sunday after Easter 2nd and 3rd April 2016

My Dear People

It is only a week since we celebrated the momentous event of Jesus rising from the dead. The Resurrection of Jesus means that we can look at everything in a different way. We now know that Jesus came to save us all, to give us hope and to lead us all to the fullness of life both on earth and in heaven.

It took the first disciples quite a while to fully appreciate what it meant to be called by Jesus. As Jesus was arrested, almost all of them ran away. After his death two tried to run away to Emmaus, half of them went back to their former lives and began fishing once again. We've just heard today that Thomas simply did not believe that Jesus was risen, he wanted good solid proof.

Jesus provided that proof, inviting Thomas to touch the wounds in his body. The fascinating thing is that Thomas was persuaded not by touching the wounds of Jesus, but by the fact that Jesus trusted him. It was the invitation not the touch that re-awakened the faith of Thomas. Thomas was able to say with total conviction My Lord and My God.

Jesus trusts us. We too are asked to respond with those words My Lord and My God. Jesus has called us and invites us to follow him and to witness to him in our world and in our time. There are millions of Catholics in the world today who give thanks to Thomas for founding the Church in India. Thomas journeyed far beyond his comfort zone as a result of the invitation of Jesus to touch him. We too are being asked to take risks and go places we never expected to go.

On your way out of church after Mass you will be given a leaflet entitled Our Journey so Far. It will tell you where we are in our diocese as we explore how best to become communities witnessing to Jesus in our world today. Parishioners throughout the diocese have done a great deal of work reflecting on their parish in our Forward Together in Hope programme. You will read how at the present time the views of thousands of people are being considered, and in June this year, every one of our parishes will be invited to look at their community with new eyes. Every parish will also be invited to look at the observations offered to them with their neighbouring communities. All of us, lay people and clergy together, will need

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something of the faith and courage of Thomas to explore how we witness to Jesus in a future with far fewer priests. We will need faith and courage to explore how the God-given gifts of lay men and women can be freed to serve the local communities in our diocese and how parish communities can work much more closely together. This will help us make sure that we can continue to witness to Jesus, serve others with love and worship God in the future.

I want to take the opportunity today to ask you to continue to pray so that the Holy Spirit will indeed guide us as we face a very different future. We will all have to change, lay men and women to accept new responsibilities, clergy to let go and work more closely with lay people and each other. It may seem frightening, but we can see from the example of the first disciples of Jesus that extraordinary things are possible when we are open to the guidance, inspiration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you for everything you are doing to help us face the future with faith and courage as we explore how we can witness to those who do not believe that our God loves us all.

With my very best wishes

+ Séamus

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