

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



Pastoral Letter for Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Launch of the Clergy Training Fund 2018**

My dear brothers and sisters

The healing encounter between Bartimaeus and the Lord Jesus in our gospel is a powerful reminder of just who it is that invites us to gather around the Altar for Mass today. The call to faith comes from Christ and your presence here is a response to the Master who has called you! Each of us hears that call through others, we are here because others have led us to faith and knowledge of Jesus and the Church. Bartimaeus heard the invitation of Jesus through the long forgotten, nameless yet willing people who extended the Lord's call to him. Jesus called; but Bartimaeus needed the assistance of others to hear and respond. We do not know who they were but their words, simple and ordinary as they were, had an amazing effect and remain for us to hear: Courage! Get up he is calling you! The encounter that followed changed Bartimaeus' life forever! Our journey in faith, our story, include many meetings and encounters with those who have introduced us to Jesus and helped us grow in relationship with him. We too lend our voices to the Lord and become messengers of the Lord's call to others.

Our Second Reading today came from the Letter to the Hebrews in which the author tells us that Jesus Christ is the supreme High Priest who has brought an end to the old priesthood of the Temple in Jerusalem by his sacrifice on Calvary. Just as the former priests of the Temple, aware of their own limitations and weakness, were able to identify with the people they were called on to serve, so too does Jesus who shares fully in our humanity, though without sinning. We all share in the priesthood of Christ through Baptism. In addition to this some, whilst also very much aware of their weaknesses, are called to share in Christ's leadership ministry of service through the sacrament of Holy Orders. From the earliest moments of the Church, through the laying on of hands, God has called ordinary men to share in the extraordinary ministry of the priesthood. The priest is charged with preaching the gospel, celebrating the Sacraments, especially the Sacrifice of the Mass, and caring for the Lord's flock. Working alongside the faithful lay people entrusted to his care, the priest is invited by Jesus to spend his life encouraging others to respond to their baptismal vocation.

On Tuesday, our Diocesan family will celebrate the feast of the Blessed Martyrs of Douai College, over 160 English and Welsh priests of different ages and backgrounds who died while ministering to their countrymen and women. Their only crime was the priesthood. Their great legacy is the Church in this country which continues to bear witness to the faith for which they forfeited their lives. The martyr priests spent themselves for the sake of the Lord and his people, our diocese has a great tradition of men who following their example have offered their lives in priestly service.

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In our own time, we need holy and selfless ministers – witnesses – to remind us by their service, ministry and faith of the truth and beauty of the Catholic Faith in Jesus the Lord. Without priests, there is no Eucharist and without the Eucharist there is no Church. Our challenge is to do all that we can to foster priestly vocations in our families, schools and parishes – this is the task of us all –as we earnestly ask the Lord to provide labourers for his harvest.

Today, on the occasion of the launch of the annual appeal for the Clergy Training Fund, I ask you to pray as individuals and communities for the gift of vocations to the priesthood in our Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. It is Jesus who calls and sends, so it is to him that I invite you to pray and unite your sacrifices; that young men may hear the call of the Shepherd and courageously respond to it. If you are a single man, I ask you to consider whether God may be calling you to serve Him as a priest? Secondly, I ask you to foster in your homes, schools and parishes a culture of vocation by praying for vocations, inviting our young men and boys to think about a priestly vocation and to encourage them with your support. Finally, I appeal to your kindness and generosity as we launch the Clergy Training Fund.

The Clergy Training Fund which relies upon your donations, legacies and bequests is the sole means of supporting the formation of men training for the Priesthood and the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese. Your kindness will ensure that our Diocese has the resource to train ministers for the Church both today and into the future. The Fund remains open for four weeks for family and individual donations.

Currently, the Diocese has three seminarians studying for the Priesthood; one at the Venerable English College in Rome and two at Saint Mary's College, Oscott. There are also seven men who are engaged in discerning whether God is calling them to serve as priests. We also are blessed with candidates for the Permanent Diaconate who are in formation for ministry in the Diocese. The Clergy Training Fund also supports the ongoing formation of our clergy supporting them in their ministry to the Church in our changing world. It is thanks to the sacrifice and generosity of parishioners past and present that we can support this vital work in the mission of our diocese.

Like those who assisted Bartimaeus in the Gospel today, enabling him to follow the Lord's invitation, we too must lend our voices to Jesus. Whether it is in prayer for vocations, as individuals and communities, or in encouragement of those who may be being called to priesthood or diaconate. We work together in the noble and vital task of allowing those whom Jesus may be calling to service as priests and deacons in His Church to hear and respond to His call.

With my very best wishes



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