

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



Sede Vacante



My dear people

4th March 2019

Pastoral Letter for Lent **To be read in all parishes weekend of 16th and 17th March 2019**

During the past ten years I have had the privilege and honour of serving you as your Bishop. As we prepare to welcome Bishop Robert Byrne as the fourteenth Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to the clergy, the religious and you the people of the diocese for the support which you have given to me during these years.

We have heard in the Gospel today how Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to witness his transfiguration. Peter exclaims that it was a great privilege for them to experience this. Peter rightly understood that any journey, no matter how difficult, which ultimately leads to a deeper understanding and revelation of the Lord's love for us is always a great gift. The invitation to the apostles and to us, as always, is to *'Listen to him'*.

As I reflect on my time as Bishop, and my many visits to all the worshipping communities and schools across the diocese, I have been humbled by the many good people of faith who I have encountered. It is always encouraging to see the Spirit of the Lord at work in so many ways in the lives of the faithful building up the church and witnessing to the kingdom. It is reassuring that we have many gifted people working in the diocese who seek to fulfil their calling and vocation to be genuine followers of Jesus in this way. I wish to thank you for the rich source of inspiration you have been for me and for others. I firmly believe that we are truly blessed in this diocese with all the gifts and talents we may need to face the future with renewed hope.

I would especially like to thank the priests of the diocese for their cooperation, hard work and kindness. I have always been impressed by their dedication, enthusiasm, commitment and willingness to take up new appointments when asked. I also thank you all for the support which you give to our priests and I encourage you to continue to assist them in their generous work of service.

Without doubt these are challenging times for the church. It is, therefore, all the more important that we unite around our faith in Christ Jesus and support each other in our pilgrimage of faith.

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If we persevere in sharing our lives with the Lord, then I am sure that like Peter, James and John, although it might feel like life is an uphill struggle at times, we too will ultimately also glimpse something of the Glory of the Lord to sustain and confirm us in faith. As Pope Francis says, *'We journey with our eyes fixed on heaven, but with our feet firmly on the ground'*.

I ask you, then, to make this season of Lent a special time of prayer so that like those early apostles, we too will be strong enough to witness afresh to the Lord's resurrection at Easter.

As we make ready to give a great welcome to Bishop Robert, when he takes up his appointment in a short while, I ask you to hold him in prayer. I know that he is very much looking forward to meeting you all and serving you as your new bishop.

On a personal note I thank you for your prayers, for your patience, for your help and for your kindness to me. Above all I thank you sincerely for the witness you give to your faith. May God bless you all as you seek to grow in loving commitment as disciples of Jesus.

I conclude with a quote from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (3:20-21), which may be familiar:

"Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen"

With very best wishes

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "+ Séamus". The plus sign is a simple cross, and the name is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✘ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham
Apostolic Administrator

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