

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



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



Pastoral letter for weekend of 5th and 6th May

Welcome Back Sunday

My dear people

How many times when we have to fill out an official form or we need to give information about ourselves, we need to give the number on our house or flat door, the street or road where we live, because our address is a vital part of our ID.

Our address of course, represents more than the place where we live; it is our "home". Home is an important part of our lives. When we are travelling far away, we look forward to returning home. At the end of a long day at work or out shopping or visiting others, there's nothing like getting back home to relax, put our feet up and be with the things and the people we are familiar with.

When Jesus in today's Gospel describes the relationship he desires to have with each one of us, he uses the word "home". "Make your home in me as I make mine in you". Jesus desires each of us to have the closest of loving relationships with him. In fact, he tells us that just as a branch cannot survive cut off from the stem, neither can we unless we remain in him. This relationship is at the heart of our Catholic faith and it is realised not only in our personal lives but also in our lives as part of the community we call our local parish. This should be our spiritual home, a place of welcome where we can be with Jesus and one another.

We, here at Mass today, know the value of having this relationship with Jesus. We know that our faith brings us life, like a vine gives life to the branches. But sadly we all know of many who no longer seem to have this close connection to Jesus, members of our families, people at school, at work, and our neighbours. We all know people we love – very good and decent people - who no longer come to church and practise their faith.

More often, when people no longer come to Mass, it's not because they've lost their faith but they've simply lost the habit of coming to their local church. People often need a reminder that we are there for them and that their parish is their spiritual home where the door is always open to them.

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In three weeks' time, across the whole diocese, we are having a Welcome Back Sunday. This is an opportunity for us to make our love not just words or mere talk but something real and active. As we listened to the story of Paul in our first reading, we recognised that Barnabas played a crucial part in helping Paul to become part of the Christian community. Because of Barnabas they understood Paul's change of heart, his desire to follow Christ and to be part of the Christian community – to be at home with them. Each of us can be a Barnabas to re-introduce someone to their parish community and so "take another look."

I have been heartened to hear many stories of how people in the diocese made a real and generous invitation to family, and friends to join us on Pentecost Sunday last year. This year again I ask you to pray for and then gently invite someone who no longer comes to Mass to come with you to church on the week-end of 26/27th May when we celebrate the great feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the church. If you are able to take up this challenge, invitation cards are available at the back of church to help you in approaching someone. Let us pray that once again this year we may welcome back people across our diocese to take another look and find their home again with us.

With best wishes

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