



**Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney  
Bishop of Nottingham**

**Pastoral Letter appointed to be read out at all Masses celebrated on  
Saturday 17th and Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018.**

### **First Sunday Of Lent**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On this first Sunday of Lent I wish to speak to you about the connection between Almsgiving and the Eucharist.

CAFOD, as you know, is our Catholic Agency in England and Wales for Overseas Development. It works closely with local partner agencies in many poor and developing countries. As a new CAFOD Trustee, I was very privileged last month to be invited to visit some of their projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador. It was a truly humbling and yet inspiring experience, to see the transforming difference that the money we give to CAFOD can make to the lives of many poor and oppressed people. I saw first-hand, how children and young people, living in very violent gangland areas, were being helped to work through their trauma by way of dance, sport, art and counselling, and to have a new outlook and self-confidence about their futures; how very poor people, through being given the chance to learn basic business skills and to receive an interest-free loan, have been empowered to start their own small businesses, such as a Café, making sandals, or fattening up chickens.

I visited the simple little houses which CAFOD, working with local partner agencies, has enabled to be built, at a reasonable cost, for disadvantaged people. During Lent we are encouraged to give alms, as well as to pray and fast. What I witnessed with CAFOD was not alms-giving in the sense of handouts to the needy, but rather the empowering of people with new skills, a loan, and a self-belief that things can be different. I was deeply impressed! This Friday is the CAFOD Lenten Fast Day, and I encourage you to give as generously as you can in Mass next Sunday to support their work. The UK government has pledged to match, pound for pound, all that is donated, so this is a wonderful opportunity to double the money that CAFOD receives, and so enable it to continue to help make a transforming difference to the lives of many more people.

The reason why we give alms as generously as we can to CAFOD, and to other charities, is because of our love for Christ, truly present in the Eucharist. It was Pope Saint John Paul II who spoke of the Eucharist as 'the active school of love for neighbour'. He saw clearly that if our celebration of the Mass is sincere, then it is in and through the Mass, and times of Eucharistic Adoration, that we are helped to grow in greater awareness of the dignity every person has in the eyes of Christ; and that this, in turn, can help us to become more sensitive to the injustices and oppression that people often face. Pope John Paul recognised the unity there should be between the breaking of the Eucharistic bread in the Mass, and our Christian commitment to the creation of a new and more just world. His teaching is, of course, not something new, and it is consistent with the strong and clear biblical and patristic tradition in the Catholic Church that there should be an indissoluble connection between true worship of God and social justice. In the Old Testament, all of the prophets are critical of worship of God that neglects justice and concern for the poor and the vulnerable in the community:

Isaiah, speaking as the mouthpiece for God, expresses it like this,

You may multiply your prayers, I shall not listen...Take your wrong-doing out of my sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good, Search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:13-17)

This strong tradition of the prophets is taken up by Jesus, who explicitly refers to it in one of his many angry discussions with some of the Pharisees. He appeals to them:

"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'."  
(Matt. 9:13 quoting the prophet Hosea 6:6)

The practice of the early Church, as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, shows that there was a real concern for the poor and vulnerable in the context of the Eucharistic breaking of the bread:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship,  
To the breaking of bread and the prayers...  
And all who believed were together and had all things in common;  
and they sold their possessions and goods,  
and distributed them to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2: 42, 44, 45)

The point that emerges from this rather rapid overview of the biblical tradition is this, that there is an indissoluble link between worship of God and justice and concern for others. This is brought out, rather dramatically, in a homily at Mass by St John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople around the year 400AD:

‘Do you want to honour Christ’s body? Then do not honour him here in the Church with silken garments, while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked...Of what use is it to weigh down Christ’s table with golden cups when he himself is dying of hunger? First fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table’. (Hom 50 Mt. Ev., 3-4)

St Chrysostom vividly makes the point, that Christ Jesus, who is really, truly and ‘substantially’ present whenever we gather to celebrate the Mass and in times of Eucharistic Adoration, is the same Christ who is also present in the hungry, poor and exploited of our society and wider world. This means that when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, or when we encounter and spend time with Our Lord in Adoration, we cannot simply choose the more comfortable real presence of Christ Jesus in the Eucharist, and ignore the more disturbing real presence of Christ Jesus in the hungry, poor and oppressed of our day. But rather, the Lord, whom we truly encounter in the Eucharist, is our motivation for all we do by way of concern and support for our brothers and sisters in need. As Jesus instructs us, ‘in so far as you did this to one of the least of my brothers (and sisters) you did it to me’ (Matt. 25: 40). We see in them the suffering face of Christ, and we respond, as generously we can.

This Lent I would like to encourage you to think of the Mass and Eucharistic Adoration as an encounter, a place where God begins to create a community of people who strive to unite prayer with action, praise with justice, adoration with social involvement, a place where love of God and love of neighbour are entwined. This understanding of the Eucharist helps us to see that our real motivation for why we support the work of CAFOD and other charities, is not just out of a concern for those less fortunate than ourselves. It is Christ himself, whom we encounter here in Mass and in Eucharistic Adoration, who is the one who motivates us, out of a sense of justice, to recognise, love and respond to his presence in the poor and exploited. So going to Mass is never simply the fulfilment of an obligation, it is about the renewal of our commitment to do everything we can to cooperate with Christ to change our world for the better.

May the Lord bless and transform all our hearts this Lent.

You will be in my prayers. Please keep me in yours.

+ Patrick

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**Bishop's House - Nottingham**  
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