

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,  
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



**Pastoral Letter for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**10-11 February 2018**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Leprosy is a terrible disease, still disfiguring many people and communities in the world today. In the Readings at Mass today we hear a great deal about leprosy. We heard, in the Book of Leviticus, how those who contract the disease were set apart, rejected by the community. We heard, in the Gospel, how Jesus, being moved with compassion, healed the leper who came to him. We learned that in the action of healing Jesus touched the leper. He, too, then, had to 'stay outside in places where nobody lived.' He could 'no longer go openly into any town.' As I read these words I think that Jesus, too, was now an outcast because he had touched a leper.

In these texts from the Old and New Testaments, leprosy can be taken in both a literal and symbolic sense. Symbolically it represents all those disfigurements of human life which cause people to be excluded or, as Pope Francis likes to say, confined to the 'peripheries' of society. There are many such excluded people, and many places and means of exclusion.

This Gospel passage, then, addresses the drama of every divided society, ours included. It presents us with one compelling truth: that Jesus chooses to identify himself with those who are excluded, with those who are cast out. He teaches us to despise no one. In reaching out and touching the leper, Jesus becomes one with him, sharing his isolation and rejection. Jesus is telling us, very plainly: If you wish to be with me, come and reach out to those most in need. I am there!

The list of those excluded from our midst is long indeed. You can draw it up yourselves. It will include the homeless, those with mental illness, the elderly who live long days alone, those without hope, those driven out of home and neighbourhood through war or persecution and now living in refugee camps or detention centres on the outskirts of cities around the world. Among them we find the face of Jesus, a face that is God's face, from which we must not turn.

In the course of the coming week, the Season of Lent begins. It is a time for renewal for each one of us, a time to draw closer to the Lord so that He may pick us up and set us again on His pathway of the fullness of life. The steps we are invited to take during Lent include the three traditional Lenten practices: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We are to make these practices a more constant part of our life and behaviour throughout these next five and a half weeks. Through daily prayer we open our hearts to the Lord; through fasting, or self-denial, we

quieten the clamour within us for self-indulgence; in almsgiving we have a means of reaching out to those in need, giving expression to our compassion for them.

Today I want to encourage you to make almsgiving a consistent part of your observance of Lent. Please consider what you can do to contribute, week by week, to the appeals that will be made, for good work both overseas and at home. In these considerations, I ask you to give a place to the Appeal that I make: the Cardinal's Lenten Appeal. Leaflets will be available next week that explain this in more detail. Do take one and consider the invitation it contains.

Simply put, the Cardinal's Lenten Appeal enables me to offer funding to new programmes of outreach across the Diocese that address some of today's more pressing problems here at home. In the last year, the generosity of many people to the Cardinal's Appeal has enabled us to create a new programme of support for prisoners, especially young prisoners; it is helping us to establish a social enterprise initiative to create employment and training opportunities for some of the most marginalised people in our community; it is helping to expand Catholic marriage counselling programmes, as there is nowhere quite as lonely as a deeply unhappy marriage. These are some examples of the work that the Appeal supports in its key areas of social outreach, young people and marriage and family life.

Any Catholic parish, school, charity or organisation is invited to apply to the Cardinal's Appeal for a grant in support a project that is innovative and effective in touching the lives of those in need in these three areas. It is, therefore, open to you.

I thank most sincerely those who have supported the Cardinal's Lenten Appeal over the last two years. I ask all of you to consider supporting it this year, if that is possible for you, so that this work can grow stronger and that we have the resources to respond readily and flexibly to the challenges we see around us.

In his Letter to the people of Corinth, as we have just heard, St Paul encourages them, very simply, with these words: 'Whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God!' As we approach Lent together, setting out to be a people who pray, who fast and who give alms, whatever we decide to do to mark Lent this year, let us simply 'do it for the glory of God'. Then the Lord can truly touch our hearts and give us a tenfold measure of His gifts in return.

May God bless you this coming Lent. Be sure of my prayers for you and please do keep me in your prayers.

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster