

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



**Pastoral Letter for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
16 February 2020**

The prayer of our Mass today expresses the desire of our faith: that God's grace will create in us "hearts that are true and just" which can be "a dwelling pleasing to you." We pray that our way of life will be marked by an unaffected truthfulness and a lasting sense of justice. We pray, too, that we may be comforted, in all circumstances, by an enduring sense of God's presence.

Soon we will be entering the season of Lent, a time when we seek spiritual renewal in our lives. Step by step we will look into ourselves and pinpoint the ways in which we are neither truthful nor just, and the ways in which we close our hearts to the promptings of God.

Today's Gospel already points to some aspects of that self-examination: no place for anger; for self-indulgence and betrayal, especially within sexual intimacy and the commitments we have given. Rather, we seek wisdom and find happiness in following God's law. This is our project.

A few days ago, I was privileged to meet Pope Francis. At my request, he blessed a new icon dedicated to Our Lady of Walsingham. He did so because he knows that during this Lent, on 29th March, all are invited to make a personal Act of Dedication of our country to Our Blessed Lady. In doing so we repeat the Dedication made in 1381 by Richard II of England who promised this land and its people as the Dowry of Mary.

There is much for us to learn about being the Dowry of Mary and the love which is expressed in that title. It is rich in history even if not contemporary in language. I hope we can use these coming weeks to deepen our knowledge of this ancient and lovely devotion.

This fits well into our Lenten journey. Mary will always lead us to her Son. She will take us to him so that he can show us his love and mercy.

There are two special occasions during which we can invite Mary to lead our Lenten journey.

The first is the three-day period from 19th to 22nd March when the Statue of Our Lady of Walsingham will come to Westminster Cathedral. There will be three days of devotion and renewal. Please do come if you can.

The second occasion is the three days from 26th to 28th March, leading up to the National Day of Rededication on 29th March. I hope that all of us can observe these days of prayer, asking Mary to embrace this country of ours, to instill in us a truthfulness and a love of justice, so that we may experience, as she herself did, the joy of the Lord's presence.

We all know well the title of Mary as our 'sorrowful Mother'. We turn to her in our sorrows. Yet there is another tribute to her, even more deeply rooted in our tradition. It is that of the Joys of Mary. These Joys, often numbered as seven, include the coming of the Angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation and the wondrous birth of her Son, our Blessed Saviour and her glorious entry into the happiness of heaven. We share in them for they are the great joy of our faith. Indeed, we are called to be heralds of this joy in a world often in need of joyfulness. May Mary help us to know and share her joy as we live and proclaim our faith.

May God bless us and guide us throughout this coming Lent.

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols" with a small cross symbol to the left of the name.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster