



**A Pastoral Letter
on Re-starting in Lent**

To be read at all Masses on the First Sunday of Lent, 6th March 2022

My dear brothers and sisters,

Christ's victory over the temptations in the wilderness is recounted at the beginning of every Lent. In each temptation, the Devil proposes to Our Lord a seemingly easier path to accomplish His mission than the Sacrifice of the Cross and His total self-giving in the Eucharist. Turning the desert's stones into free food, seizing political power or becoming a spectacle to entertain the crowds might momentarily win applause, but will not save humanity. These temptations are recounted because we can be tempted to seek deceptively easier paths in our Christian lives and in the mission of the Church. It is why we need this Lenten time of conversion so we may truly "*worship the Lord our God and serve Him alone*".ⁱ

This year, in our parishes we are re-starting in adverse conditions and with diminished resources. We are deeply concerned for the Ukrainian people and the peace of the world as the shadow of war has fallen over Europe. At such a moment, I want us to be sure of the inexhaustible resources of faith and grace given us. As Saint Paul reminded the beleaguered faithful in Rome, by relying on the Name of the Lord we will never lack all we need.ⁱⁱ Diminished we might be, as we emerge from a pandemic, yet we can never doubt from our Baptism, that we have been sustained by every grace, above all, the supreme gift of the Holy Eucharist.

Thanksgiving must surely be our starting point, in recognition of all we have received in the life of the Church. Thanksgiving is the characteristic of Christian prayer.ⁱⁱⁱ I was especially struck by the words of the last testament of the saintly Pope Paul VI, who constantly repeated "*Lord, I thank you.*" Pope Paul asked, how can we ever thank the Lord sufficiently for the gift of life and the still higher gift of faith and grace. So many graces, so many mercies, so many examples given us. Above all, Saint Paul VI insisted we must give thanks that we have been brought into the life of the Catholic Church where all the means of grace and salvation are found.^{iv}

The people of Macclesfield will this year give thanks for 200 years of renewed Catholic mission in their district. As we look back with them to the founding generation of our Diocese, we recall how “*few in number*”^v they were and lacking in material resources; yet they knew the gifts of faith and grace were their true riches. As Saint John Vianney reflected, we might see ourselves as poor when vast riches of grace have been given us in prayer, in the Sacrament of Penance and, above all, in the Eucharist. The Cure of Ars compared us to someone dying of thirst beside an immense river of fresh water. If only we would reach out, he said, yet we fail to see! Lent is an invitation to recognise God’s grace and the very presence of Christ Himself is now within our reach.

This Sunday, we pray for the Ukrainian people and for the peace of the world in response to Pope Francis’s call to draw upon the spiritual resources of Lent to overcome “the madness of war”.^{vi} The Holy Father has echoed the call of Our Lady at Fatima who entrusted this same message to poor children, amid the carnage and destruction of the First World War. The children of Fatima, two of whom have been declared among the Saints by Pope Francis,^{vii} had no human means to end a war, yet recognised the power of prayer, of receiving and adoring the Eucharist, of offering the small sacrifices of each day with great love. This Lent invites us to take up these same means as we intercede for peace and unite our prayer and penance to the practical help we offer to the suffering.

In the great re-start of Lent, let us recognise the gifts and graces which mark our Christian lives; above all the supreme gift of the Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Altar. Let us return to the Altar and the Tabernacle of our parishes in the joyful recognition of faith and prayer, and wherever possible in prolonged Eucharistic Adoration. This is surely the best place for us to start anew.

United with you in this prayer,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Mt. 4: 10; Lk. 4:8

ⁱⁱ Cf. Rom. 10: 13

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 2637

^{iv} Cf. The Second Vatican Council Unitatis Redintegratio No.3

^v Dt. 26:28

^{vi} Cf. General Audience, Wednesday 23rd February 2022

^{vii} Cf. Saint Jacinta and Saint Francisco Canonised by Pope Francis in May 2017