



A Pastoral Letter

*to be read aloud in the churches and chapels of
the Archdiocese of Liverpool at Holy Mass 14/15 February 2026*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

On Wednesday, we begin our journey of Lent towards Easter. I invite you to our churches on Ash Wednesday to receive the ashes and begin once more the journey of conversion. They remind us of our mortality and that we need God's forgiveness and salvation.

Lent is an opportunity to refocus our lives on Jesus Christ who speaks to us 'heart to heart'. Always remember that your names are written in 'letters of love' on the heart of Jesus (St Francis de Sales). I hope that over forty days we can clear away some of the obstacles and weeds that clutter up our lives so that we can see, feel and know more deeply the love of Jesus for each one of us. In our loud and busy world, we are invited to find stillness in Christ.

St Augustine presents a wonderful image of the heart needing to be expanded to receive God's love. Pope Benedict (*Spe salvi*) wrote, '[St] Augustine refers to Saint Paul, who speaks of himself as straining forward to the things that are to come (cf. Phil 3:13). He then uses a very beautiful image to describe this process of enlargement and preparation of the human heart. "Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God's tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?" The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the

vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined'

Prayer, fasting – maybe from social media and scrolling at all times of the day – and almsgiving are the firm foundation for stretching the heart and creating space for the Holy Spirit. They help us to grow in love and generosity towards others.

During Lent, we pray for those who will receive the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil. They will be preparing for the wonderful moment of their baptism. Then they will be dressed in white robes and carry the lighted baptismal candle of faith into the world. They are our new green shoots. I look forward to welcoming them with their families to the Cathedral on the afternoon of the First Sunday of Lent. I find this liturgy (the Rite of Election) very encouraging as I listen to their journeys to Christian faith and their desire to become Catholics. I invite you to join me there. Each person has met Jesus; sometimes through a future spouse or the witness of a friend; at other times by walking into a church and feeling that they have come home, or through music and a beautiful celebration of the Mass. God continues to prompt – we must listen. I am inspired that many young people are now looking for Christ and asking to become members of the Church. Walking with Christ makes sense to them and gives them new life, even in adversity. They are an example to us.

Their desire for Christian faith invites us to reflect on our own baptism. As we look forward to celebrating the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection at Easter, we remember that by baptism the Lord Jesus has summoned 'us to the glory of being now called a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [his] own possession, to proclaim everywhere [his] mighty works, for [He has] called us out of darkness into [his] own wonderful light.' As God's holy people, we have a wonderful dignity and are invited to be 'salt to the earth' and 'light to the world.' Each one of you has received a call from God. As St John Henry Newman tells us, 'God knows me and calls me by my name.... God has created me to do Him some definite service'. Your calling is lived out in your families, at work, at school, in homes, in hospitals,

during daily life. The call is to love – Lent is a time to do the ordinary things of life with extraordinary love.

The Lord Jesus gives us a special gift to help our repentance and conversion. It is the sacrament of reconciliation. I encourage you to avail of the sacrament. It may be a long time since you have been to confession, but the forgiveness of God is generous and merciful. I encourage you as your bishop to make a good confession. Do not be afraid! Confession of sins is an act of trust in God. I have asked our priests to make this sacrament available in the families of parishes. We need often to hear the words of absolution and forgiveness of sins. They bring you and me consolation and peace.

May this season be a time of blessings and renewal.

May God bless you all.

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Archbishop of Liverpool