

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER
for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
3rd February 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During the months before Christmas last year, together with Sarah Kilmartin and Clare Wordsworth, I visited the Deaneries to present the Pastoral Plan. This was the fruit of a process that had begun over a year before and I wish to thank all those who attended those meetings. Thanks go, too, to Mgr. Tony Barry and Fr. Peter Newsam, the Episcopal Vicars for Surrey and Sussex who attended the meetings in their respective areas. By the time the round of meetings was complete, some 3,500 people from across the Diocese had heard the presentations. This is a wonderful beginning to a new stage in the life of our Diocese.

Today's Readings present some themes that will bear our reflection as we look to the future and the place that each of us has in the mission the Lord has given to us.

We must reflect that, like Jeremiah, we are known by God before ever we came to be. Like Jeremiah, we have a prophetic role to play. Both as individuals and as a community of faith, we must live out the message of the Gospel – not simply for our own good, but for the good of the world around us. Like Jeremiah, we may be fearful, feel that we are incapable of such a responsibility. However, we can – and must – be confident. There is no need for fear. We must not be dismayed. We must be people of action. God Himself will give us all the strength that we need, and more. As the psalmist reminds us: the Lord is our hope, we trust in Him.

In today's Gospel, the Lord is at first welcomed. However, when the import of His message becomes clear to his hearers, he is rejected. This may be our experience at times. There will be many of us who walked the path of misunderstanding and rejection on account of our Faith. This is difficult and can be a very great cross to bear. However, we know too that the way of Christ is one of victory, even over death itself. As St. Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Romans,

nothing “can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”¹ The Lord is with us and His love overcomes all things, even death itself.

In today’s second Reading, St. Paul writing to the Corinthians, speaks of the virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. All these are gifts. Faith must be experienced by others in our actions. If not, as St. James states clearly in his letter, our Faith will be a dead thing.² Our Hope will be evident in our persevering prayer that is born of Faith and leads us to complete Trust. The Love that is the greatest of these three, is authentic when we open ourselves to the call of Christ and the power of the Spirit. These three gifts – when we are truly open to them – will enable us to be truly the Lord’s disciples, courageous in witness and with minds and hearts devoted to the Mission He has given to His Church.

As we look to the future, then, let us be confident. There will be difficulties along the way for we are called to take up the Cross,³ but it is the Lord’s work that we are doing and His strength will always be far greater than our fears, worries and concerns.

Let us, as individuals and as a community of Faith, be people of action. May we all be open to the changes that will be necessary for the work that lies ahead. Through a renewed commitment to daily prayer and to an ever deepening understanding of all that the Lord has done for us, may we truly embrace the Mission that the Lord, in his Love, has entrusted to us.

With every Blessing,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

¹ Rm. 8:39.

² Jm. 2:17.

³ Mt. 16:24.