



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

To be read and distributed on the weekend of 27th – 28th November

First Sunday of Advent 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

As we celebrate the First Sunday of Advent and begin a new liturgical year, I would like to write to you about two matters, with a comment on another concern.

During the summer, there was a letter from all the bishops of England and Wales which spoke of the First Sunday of Advent as the time when it was to be hoped that we would all feel confident in returning to Sunday Mass. Given the recent history and unpredictability of the Covid pandemic, and the fact that we are still experiencing high rates of infection in some areas, it is understandable that some people, particularly those with underlying medical conditions, may still feel that they should be cautious. This is to be accepted without question. It is important that we look forward to the time when we can, with confidence, meet together for our celebration of our Faith and to receive the Eucharist as our spiritual food for our journey and mission. So, if you feel that you cannot attend Mass for the time being, please do not consider yourself in any way excluded or at fault. We look forward to welcoming you back when you judge the time is right.

The Bishops of England and Wales have written to us all again on this subject and it is available on the diocesan website. It highlights our privilege and the gift of participating together in the Eucharist.

The second matter concerns the Universal Synod which was launched by Pope Francis on 10th October and which was initiated here, and in all dioceses, on 17th October, entitled '*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*'. It is important that we understand its purpose and meaning. A Synod is not a debating event where people bring their arguments and opinions in order to win a discussion. A Synod is a prayerful journey of listening to what the Holy Spirit may be saying to the Church at this time so that we may live the Gospel values and continue the mission of Christ in our own times, with the present needs and opportunities. We are all invited by Pope Francis to take part. Indeed the very word Synod means on a journey TOGETHER. It is important that in our Diocese we listen to each other, we listen to the voices of those not in the church pews, and together we listen to the Word of God which has been handed down to us.

In our Diocese this can be the first step in a longer and deeper listening journey to help us shape the Diocese for the future, building on the work of *Hope in the Future* and other positive initiatives. In this journey it is important that we hear from people who have drifted from the Church and feel that the Church does not offer them the assistance that they need or is not fulfilling its mission as they understand it. We will need to listen to those on the margins of the Church or of society and those who feel excluded from either. It will be important to hear, also, from people of other traditions about how they perceive the Church.

The Universal Synod offers ten questions which will be published to us all. I wish to encourage you, either individually or in a group, to submit a response via the online form on the Diocesan website, using the paper form, or via email. Details of how to respond are on the website and in your parish newsletter. A summary of the responses will be made available to the whole Diocese. We must all pray that the whole Church may be a listening Church and that we invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us, so as to guide us on our journey. Responses need to be submitted to our Diocesan Synodal Office by 1st March 2022. After national and continental gatherings, the Synod of Bishops will gather in Rome in 2023 to reflect on what has been heard from our brothers and sisters all around the world.

Finally, although some welcome and necessary decisions were made concerning the environment at the COP26 meeting, there is still a great deal of work to be done and further urgent decisions needing to be made. Let us be generous in our prayer for all those engaged in healing the damage of climate change and for all our sisters and brothers who are already suffering in so many different ways because of our plundering of our world's resources.

We have challenging times ahead, so let us continue to pray "Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey"

With my blessing and prayers for our family in the Diocese of Salford



+John Arnold

Bishop of Salford



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