



## Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC\*HS Bishop of Motherwell

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**21<sup>st</sup> September 2018**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ**

I greet you all in the name of Christ Our Saviour.

In last Sunday's Gospel St Peter proclaimed Jesus as "The Christ", and we are all privileged to be known as Christians through our baptism into Christ and his Body the Church. Christ instructed us in the same Gospel of his impending suffering, death, and resurrection, and responded to Peter's incomprehension with these words "*Get behind me Satan for the way you think are not God's ways but man's*". This was followed by Jesus telling us to take up our cross and follow him. There can be no doubt therefore that Jesus makes demands upon those who proclaim him as "Christ" and they are not easy – not for Peter and the disciples who heard him speak in the flesh or for us today, the Catholics of Motherwell Diocese. As Jesus warned Peter, faith in him comes with commitments, and a strong spirit of sacrifice in following and imitating the Suffering Christ. Where might these demands be?

As Catholics we know that our faith cannot be a pretence or in any way half-hearted. It is God-given and calls for the best we can give. It cannot be reduced to our convenience (*man's way*) but rather has to seek and uphold, even when difficult, the truths about God and the way of life revealed to us by Jesus. An essential part of our lives as Catholics, therefore, is our worship of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and our participation in the Sacred Liturgy and prayer-life of the Church. This means, above all, our attendance at Sunday Mass and a full-hearted commitment to make this an essential and permanent part of our weekly routine, however busy we are and whatever other worldly pursuits we enjoy. It has become far too common for us to be like everybody else and feel free to leave aside the practice of our faith. I exhort you all to be faithful Catholics and to show this by your presence at Sunday Mass.

Recently the Scottish Bishops have discussed the Holydays of Obligation kept here in Scotland and an instruction has been written by Bishop Hugh Gilbert to explain our keeping of the days of precept through the course of the Church's Year. I ask you to read this along with my own words. I wish to emphasise the importance of attending Mass on Sundays and on the Holydays of Obligation, which are beautiful Feast-Days which enhance our participation in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ and of Our Lady, the Apostles, and All Saints who now share in Christ's glory.

We are very aware that the Church has been damaged in recent years by scandals in regard to the abuse of children and vulnerable adults by clergy and others and by failures on the part of bishops in dealing with such matters in an adequate manner. This crisis has had an effect on us all and requires that every effort be made to put right past failures and to ensure that such behaviour is eradicated from the Church. Pope Francis has asked that we pray intensely for the necessary conversion to make this possible and has asked the whole Church to pray and fast so that this conversion will be realised. Prayer is a necessary part of our Christian lives at all times but we also keep periods of

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intense prayer, which, following Our Lord's own instructions and the practice of the early Church, are to be accompanied by fasting. Lent stands out as the most notable season for prayer and fasting during which we hope to draw closer to the Suffering Christ and so be more willing to carry the cross with him. Such spiritual discipline cannot be restricted, though, to the days of Lent, and indeed the Church asks us to keep each Friday as a Day of Penance since Our Lord suffered and died on a Friday. In the Church's present need and in response to the Holy Father's call to prayer and fasting I ask you to strive to keep each Friday as a penitential day marked by both some extra time spent in prayer and some element of fasting. Since the sufferings of Christ are at the heart of Friday as a Day of Penance, and the crisis in the Church involves the suffering of the innocent just as the Innocent Christ suffered on the Way to Calvary and on the Cross itself, I particularly commend to you the praying of the Stations of the Cross.

Pope Francis asks us also to reflect on Mary standing with St John at the foot of the cross sharing the pain of her Innocent Son. In our present need our imitation of Mary praying at the foot of the cross is inspiring for us as individuals and as communities of prayer. We are approaching the month of October, traditionally dedicated to the recitation of the Rosary, and it would seem good to encourage the public recitation of the Holy Rosary in our churches, homes and schools throughout the month for the conversion of the whole Church and for the protection of the innocent. Please note especially that on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October, the Feast Day of Our Lady of the Rosary, we will have The Diocesan Torchlight Procession at Carfin Grotto at 7 pm and I invite you to be there as we pray together as a Diocese and seek our Lady's powerful intercession in our present need. I appreciate other prayer initiatives may be planned in parishes and by particular groups or associations and I commend them but I would like to encourage your presence at our Diocesan Rosary and Procession as I believe we need to draw closer together as a Diocese especially under the protection and patronage of Our Blessed Lady.

I leave shortly for Rome with the other Scottish Bishops as we undertake what is known as the *Ad Limina Apostolorum* Pilgrimage to Rome. The central moments in our Pilgrimage are the celebration of Mass at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and our audience with the successor of St Peter, Pope Francis. As Scottish Catholics, we have always felt a strong bond with our Pope and we bring to Rome therefore our awareness of our communion with the Universal Church and the See of Peter and we will offer Pope Francis the prayers and support of the Catholic Church in Scotland and seek encouragement and guidance from him for our ministry as Bishops here in Scotland. I ask your own prayers for Pope Francis and ourselves through these coming days. I will pray for you all too, especially in our Masses at the Tombs of the Apostles and the Basilicas of St Mary Major and St John Lateran.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

+ Joseph Toal