



Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

Pastoral Letter on Family Life

**appointed to be read at Sunday Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham
on Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th June 2022; The Solemnity of Corpus Christi**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In the 4th century Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem, when speaking to the newly baptised about receiving Holy Communion for the first time, had this to say:

‘When you come up to receive...make your left hand a throne for the right (for it is about to receive a King), cup your palm, and so receive the body of Christ; then answer ‘Amen’...Why, if you had been given gold dust, would you not take the utmost care to hold it fast, not letting a grain slip through your fingers. How much more carefully then will you guard against losing so much as a crumb of that which is more precious than gold.’

On this Feast of Corpus Christi, we gather to do what those Christians of Jerusalem did so long ago and what Christians have continued to do with great reverence. We gather to celebrate and give thanks for this gift of the Eucharist and to do what the Lord commanded: ‘Take and eat’, ‘Take and drink’ in response to His wonderful declaration, ‘This is my Body’, ‘This is my blood’. We take the advice of Bishop Cyril to those about to receive Holy Communion for the first time, don’t judge the reality by what you see, touch and taste, judge rather by your ‘unwavering faith’. Because as he said, if the Master himself has explicitly said of the bread, ‘this is my body’, will anyone dare to doubt? When he says, ‘this is my blood’, who will say it is not? This is the truth that Saint Paul speaks of in the second reading today: ‘this is what I received from the Lord, and in turn passed on to you’. This is the faith we express each time we receive Our Lord in the Eucharist on our hand or tongue: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world; blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.’

This year, the Feast of Corpus Christi is celebrated here in England and Wales on the Sunday before the World Meeting of Families, which begins later this week in Rome. Initiated by Saint John Paul II in 1994, it is a joyful occasion to celebrate and promote the pastoral care of married couples and families through catechesis, fellowship, testimony and liturgical celebrations. The theme for this year’s ‘World Meeting of Families’ is ‘Family love: a vocation and a path to holiness’, and the Eucharist is fundamental to this. Pope Francis says that the most important celebration for a family is Sunday Mass. When families bring their lives to Jesus in the Eucharist the real meaning of life is revealed, “work, family, our daily joys and efforts, even suffering and death ...are all transfigured by the grace of Christ.” (Pope Francis catechesis on family life, August 2015)

It is in the Eucharist that men, women and children receive the grace they need to live out the vocation of marriage and family. The Catechism teaches us that the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life...for in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself.' The gift of the Eucharist is where everything in our lives flows from; it's where we draw near to the heart of Christ Jesus and learn his will for us and our families. I appreciate, however, that getting to Mass with young children can be a challenge for many families, and that parents may well be tempted to think that, since so much of their time can be spent looking after their very young children or chasing around after them when they break free, what's the point? As parents, they don't seem to be getting much out of the Mass? In response, I want to say to you as parents, Jesus is delighted that you bring your children to Mass, even with the noise and chaos that also sometimes comes along. God knows your efforts and delights in them. The clergy and parish community gathered for Mass should also be delighted that you have brought your young children, because without the excitement and noise of young children a parish can quickly become an impoverished community, a parish possibly without a future.

Pope Francis is very aware that few families are in a position to be able to travel to Rome for the World Meeting of Families this week, and so he is encouraging families to join in the Rome events and talks by means of streaming and downloading the WMoF App. He has also asked dioceses to organise local talks and events as a way of helping families and grandparents to participate in this celebration of 'Family Love: a vocation and a path to holiness.' I'm very grateful to Joe Hopkins, our diocesan Director of Adult Formation for Mission, for the work he has put into organising our own diocesan programme of celebrations, which I would encourage families to join in. This Tuesday and Thursday evening, at 8pm via Zoom, there will be talks. Tuesday's talk will explore the lives of Saints Zelig and Louis Martin, the parents of Saint Therese of Lisieux, and how their witness can encourage families seeking to grow in faith and holiness. Thursday's talk will explore what it means to be an evangelising parent.

Then next Saturday, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to celebrate a special Mass with and for families of our Diocese at Our Lady of Lincoln Church in Lincoln. Following the celebration of Mass there will be a social gathering – with music, food and games – for families in the grounds of the parish and school. I hope it will be a very joyful celebration of marriage and family life, and I encourage you to get involved. More information about these events and details on how to sign up can be found in your parish bulletins or on the Diocesan website.

Now I'd like to bring us back to this Feast of Corpus Christi and ask you to pray very particularly in Mass today for all parents. Lord, sustain them by your grace in the Eucharist and help them to give good example always to their children. Amen.

With prayer and good wishes,

+ Patrick

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