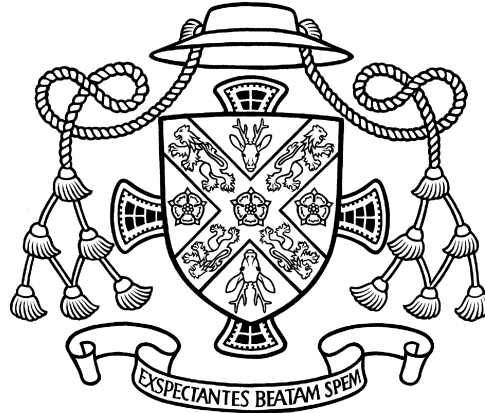


Pastoral Letter

Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

Lent 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

I suspect many of you followed the election of the President of the United States? No matter what you think of the outcome, it was certainly an important event and one which in some ways will affect all of us. There is another election coming, but I don't think you will read about it in the newspapers or see it on the TV. Nevertheless, it is an important event which will affect all of us who are gathered here in Church. The election to which I refer is the Rite of Election, which will take place in the Cathedral tomorrow afternoon/this afternoon.

All those people who have been preparing to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist will gather in the Cathedral from all over the diocese and will be declared members of the Elect, those chosen in the name of the Church to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the Easter Vigil this year. It is an important moment for them and for the Church in this diocese. Please keep them in your prayers.

The sponsors or godparents will be asked to verify that the candidates have listened to God's word, responded to it by walking in God's presence, shared the company of their Christian brothers and sisters and joined with them in prayer. The candidates will then be asked if they want to enter fully into the life of the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Then they are solemnly declared to be members of the Elect or those chosen to be initiated at the Easter Vigil. Thus they begin their journey towards spiritual rebirth and full membership of the Church when they will gather round the table of the Word and the Eucharist with us.

While we pray for the Elect, let us not neglect our own spiritual progress, especially in the light of the gospel which we have just heard. This year we are listening mainly to St Mark's Gospel. He does not waste time or words. *The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.* Here – now – repent - believe. There is a real urgency and directness in his message to us.


Did you make some resolutions at New Year? Have you kept them? If not, never mind. **This** is the moment for resolutions which will affect our lives in a real way; not just our physical state, but the whole of our lives, spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, the lot. Lent is the opportunity offered to us so that we can take stock of our relationship with the Lord, with the Church and with our sisters and brothers, recognise what needs attention and, with the grace of God, move forward in that knowledge. St Mark's urgency and directness give us a good lead.

Start here and now, not tomorrow, not next week, but this very minute, today. Repent – believe – take a closer look at yourself. Use those who are going to be baptised as a starting point, use the Elect like a mirror. Ask yourself the same questions that they are asked: have you listened to the Word of God and responded to it by walking in God's presence? Do you often share the company of your Christian brothers and sisters and join them in prayer? And what about your journey to spiritual rebirth, full membership of the Church and your desire to be gathered round the table of God's Word and the Eucharist?

When you begin to answer these questions you are already on the journey of repentance. What you need to do then is to be reconciled with the Lord, the Church and your sisters and brothers. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated at least weekly in your parish. I am sure that there will be some communal celebrations around your area where you will be ensured privacy for the confession of sins, allowed adequate time to articulate what you want to say and for the priest to respond. Even in these communal celebrations you will be given absolution individually.

The Elect repent and, by the grace of God and the prayers of the Community, journey towards Easter and the reception of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. We who have already been initiated into the mysteries of our faith journey towards Easter and the renewal of our Baptismal life by expressing our thanks in self-denial, and by the power of God's grace, mastering our sinfulness, conquering our pride and showing to those in need God's goodness to us.

I hope and pray that Lent will be a fruitful and graced time for you and all of us in the Diocese. Keep those to be initiated into the Easter Sacraments in your prayers. Imitate their zeal, and ask the Lord that, like them, we may all be renewed and brought to the glory of the resurrection and that our Easter celebration will raise us up and renew our lives by the power of the Spirit that is within us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L'.

Bishop of Middlesbrough