



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE 23rd SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - 7/8 SEPTEMBER 2013**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are now entering the last quarter of the Year of Faith and this is a good moment to pause and ask ourselves how we have responded so far. If you are a teacher you may have been to one of the Year of Faith evenings organised across the Archdiocese and perhaps you have used the special materials prepared for schools. If you have been on pilgrimage to Lourdes or Walsingham, to Hednesford or Harvington you may have been conscious of the Year of Faith themes that have shaped our pilgrimages this year.

As you look around your parish church have you noticed or got used to the Year of Faith banners and posters we have been using? Look again for the now familiar features of Blessed Dominic Barberi. His prayers have been guiding us during this special year and, as you know, I have been encouraging us all to pray for his canonisation alongside that of Blessed John Henry Newman. Perhaps you were able to join in the Holy Hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament called for by Pope Francis on the Feast of Corpus Christi earlier this year. Many of us have been guided through the Catechism of the Catholic Church as we have followed the *Doorway to Faith* booklets each day.

These and many other ways of celebrating the Year of Faith have been provided for one reason only – so that we can deepen our own response to the gift of faith, live it more fully day by day and grow in confidence about sharing it with others. Both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have encouraged us to grasp our faith and to live it more fervently as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council.

So we can ask, how can we keep up the momentum of this Year of Faith and what more can we do to deepen our own faith? Over the coming weeks there will be a number of special moments for us to re-focus on our mission as the Catholic Church in the Midlands.

At the end of this month we are dedicating a weekend to our lay catechists to mark the importance of their contribution in handing on the Catholic faith. In October there will be special Masses celebrated at Stone in Staffordshire, Littlemore in Oxford and at St Chad's Cathedral to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Beatification of Blessed Dominic Barberi – Dominic of the Mother of God – and in thanksgiving for the Year of Faith.

All of these spiritual activities are to help us to live out our faith more effectively – and sometimes more publicly – so that we can give a powerful witness to the people of our own part of the country, people we have been sent to by the Lord himself to love and to serve. But to do that as well as we can we need to be open to God’s transforming grace at work in our lives. And for that reason there is one more thing that I want to ask you to do as the Year of Faith rolls on.

The first reading of today’s Mass is taken from the Book of Wisdom. The people of our own time are thirsting for wisdom to shape and guide their lives and we have been given privileged access through the Scriptures and the Sacraments to the Wisdom of God, access which is offered to others too.

What man indeed can know the intentions of God? Who can divine the will of the Lord? Whenever we seek it, God’s wisdom and mercy are readily available to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this wonderful sacrament the words of scripture become a reality in our lives: *you have granted Wisdom and sent your holy spirit from above.* All we have to do is to acknowledge the truth about the way that we live, approach Jesus himself with a contrite heart and ask for God’s mercy.

We are often aware that something holds us back from the Sacrament of Penance and we have perhaps got out of the habit of going to Confession. The Year of Faith offers an opportunity to establish some good habits again – the habit of prayer, the practice of charity to one another, the habit of seeking God’s loving mercy so that we can bring forgiveness to others.

Today’s Gospel sets before us a high ideal as we journey through this Year of Faith. Our Lord emphasises the radical nature of discipleship, the need to let go of everything we are attached to in order to follow him. *None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.* The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers us the wisdom to see how we can live up to this ideal and the grace to put it into practice.

Next Saturday, 14th September, is the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. I have asked every parish in the Archdiocese to make the Sacrament of Penance available between 11.00am and 12.00 noon on that day. The Cross of Christ has freed us from our sins. The fruits of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross are there for us to receive sacramentally in Confession.

I would urge you to make use of this sacrament next Saturday as part of your Year of Faith, as an encouragement to others and as an expression of faith in the power of God’s mercy. Remember, too, the words of our Year of Faith patron, Blessed Dominic Barberi: *When God stirs the hearts of many to ask for any one thing it is an evident sign that He wishes to grant it.*

May the prayers of Blessed Dominic support you and those close to you in this Year of Faith.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard Longley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 23 August 2013 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on 7/8 September 2013.