

# A Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Lancaster

Sunday 1 January 2023 : Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

My dear people,

Holy Mother Church gives us the tradition of beginning each new calendar year with the celebration of Mary, Holy Mother of God. Holiness is a word that is often misunderstood. As we begin a new year let us see if we can help to put that right, both for ourselves and for those with whom we live.

Anyone fortunate enough to have had a devoted mother learns from their earliest years what a blessing they have been given. Lessons continue throughout our lives up to and even beyond the time when we lose them in death. The memory of them can bring us much consolation as we reflect on all they have done for us, all the sacrifices they made for us. These reflections can even bear fruit for us as we try to take up some of the qualities we admired in them. In present times we have so many experts in so many aspects of living. We can recognize that loving, dedicated parents are themselves experts given to us.

Much of the grief we felt and saw as a nation following the death of our late Queen, Elizabeth, was provoked by her being – in effect – the mother of our nation and Commonwealth as well as our Monarch. Dare I suggest that much of the respect in which she was held stemmed largely from what we saw of her as a mother in a family that is, like so many others, far from perfect.

Mary is given to us as a woman of Faith. This does not mean that her life was easy. Although she was spared from sin, she was not spared from struggle, hardship and even the burden of heart-breaking grief. As **The Woman of Faith** she is given to us to raise us as **children of Faith**, and to be specific, for us, this means Faith in Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary.

One of the greatest treasures parents show, teach and share with their children is how to try and live a life of Faith. What stands out for us is that Faith is turned to when life becomes hard. It is there as a lifeline, something that holds us safe when we experience hardships.

Practicing our Faith must include certain aspects if it is to be authentic. Living a life of active charity, daily prayer, and weekly Sunday Mass(worship) remain essential characteristics of a living disciple. I do understand that it is possible to live a good, worthwhile life even without professing any faith at all. But if we are to be disciples of Jesus He asks us to show our faithfulness in these particular ways. And I call again on all Catholics who are physically able to find the motivation to remain faithful to Sunday Mass, in which we are able to reflect on all that Our Lord has done for us. Here we also receive the nourishment that will strengthen Faith for the work of the week ahead. It is an antidote to the infectiousness of the world's woes.

Under the loving eye of Mary, let us begin this new year with a desire to value our Faith in our Messiah. Let us decide to carry the lights of our Christmas Faith far into it, even as the elaborate light displays we have seen along our streets are switched off and packed away so quickly. Value your Faith as a gift for your life that you can share with others. Value the relevance of holiness which can be understood as simply as knowing that there is something of God here.

None of us knows or can predict what the new year will bring. But each of us knows what we can bring to it, with a mother's help, with Mary's help.

With my blessing for you and your families at this time,

+Paul

Bishop of Lancaster