

Pastoral Letter of Bishop Alan Williams

Please read and/or make available at all Masses on the weekend of the 19th/20th July 2014
16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

This is my first pastoral letter to you as the new Bishop of Brentwood and I immediately want to thank the whole diocese for the unfailing welcome and support I have received. The diocese is an exciting mix of Essex and East London, full of challenges and opportunities. I look forward to working with you and for you.

When I worked as a University Chaplain some years ago one of my tasks was to welcome students, of all faiths and none, to their new life and the work of the chaplaincy. Odd though it may sound, I spoke first not of God, but of sin and human imperfection. People may or may not believe in God; sadly all human beings are confronted with the effects of human sin.

In today's Gospel parable Jesus talks of the wheat and the weeds that are always with us - we do not live in a perfect world yet the kingdom of heaven is being established despite our weaknesses. By faith we know that it is God who truly defines our world rather than human inadequacy.

At the ordination ceremony in the Cathedral - still very fresh in my mind - Cardinal Vincent Nichols quoted Pope Francis, *"From the lips of the church comes the cry: Give us a bishop, one who will lift us up, who will watch over us with the fullness of the heart of God. Don't send a manager, an administrator, a delegate from the agency... We need someone who knows how to reach up towards the gaze of God and who can guide us towards Him for only in His gaze is our future to be found."*

Today's reading from the Old Testament speaks with authority of the 'fullness of the heart of God'. There is infinite strength but also a depth of compassion in God - our God is 'mild in judgement', he governs us 'with great lenience'.

Because of this we can be supremely confident in God despite our sin and weakness which pull us downwards to despair.

Cardinal Vincent also reminded us that Pope Francis has given bishops clear guidelines for ministry. My first work is to be prayer; I am mandated to stay close to the people and to be the servant of the Word of God and of His people.

When I hear these challenges, like Saint Paul, I know that the Holy Spirit helps me in my weakness. I also believe that the Holy Father's words are not directed to me alone. I ask that all the people of the diocese will respond to the Holy Father's invitation to prayer, communion and service.

Life in Christ will transform our parishes, schools and diocesan communities. By the grace of God, the closer we are to Christ, the more Christ-like we become.

Please pray for me in the weeks and months ahead as I will certainly pray for you.

In Christ and Mary,

+ Alan, sm