

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

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PASTORAL LETTER

*To be read in all churches and chapels of the Archdiocese of Liverpool on
Sunday, 14 June 2009, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.*

My dear People,

In the year 1264 Pope Urban IV wanted the whole Church to keep the feast we celebrate today: the Feast of Corpus Christi - feast of the Body and Blood of our Lord. He asked Saint Thomas Aquinas to choose the psalms and the passages from the Bible and to compose hymns. Personally every year both on Maundy Thursday and on today's feast they nourish my appreciation of the Holy Eucharist.

Because of challenges which many parishes will soon face I share with you just three gifts from the wisdom of Saint Thomas.

First and so obvious: bread and wine: and bread and wine are this: what earth has given and human hands have made to be eaten, to be drunk, with thanksgiving to God and each other. In one of his hymns Saint Thomas spoke about true bread. He never wastes words and I just wonder: did he appreciate more than most of us do, how wonderful is the harmony between, for example, soil, sun, rain, labour of sowing, pruning, harvest, that enables us to have bread and wine.

But, secondly, remember this prayer, reflected at every Mass: 'Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Then, against the background of such prayer, these words of Jesus are spoken: 'This is my body...This is the cup of my blood'.

We had brought what earth has given and human hands have made. By the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and at the word of Jesus, they become his Risen Body, his life-giving Blood. Bread and wine are wonderful, that is why we should always eat and drink gratefully. And it is clear: no one ever forgot how Jesus at table gave thanks to God. But so deep is the change that comes to pass at every Mass that now we adore the Body of the Lord and eat: eat and adore the one we receive: adore the Blood of the Lord and drink: drink and adore the one we drink. The bread and wine could not be more changed if they tried.

But, thirdly, Saint Thomas insists: we do not stop even at this wonderful deed of God. We go on and pray: 'Grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ'.

The wonderful presence of our Lord among us celebrated today and recognised at every Mass is to accomplish this: 'You are the body of Christ'. We become what we receive. Saint Thomas described it like this: the purpose of the Holy Eucharist is to bring about the Unity of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Against that background I set before you these facts: by September, there will be at least eight less priests serving in the diocese. In sharp contrast there is one ordination: of Dominic Curran at St. Teresa's, St. Helens, on Friday last. And there will be no more ordinations for two years. Starkly: 8 into 1 won't go.

Not only will we have fewer priests to serve our parishes, but the need for priests to serve our local hospitals and prisons, for example, does not diminish. And that need is substantial: keeping in mind our Lord's words: 'I was sick and you took care of me', receive this list of the major centres of health-care in our midst:

Alder Hey Hospital, Broadgreen Hospital, Liverpool Cardio-Thoracic Centre, Liverpool Women's Hospital, Marie Curie Centre, Royal Liverpool University Hospital, University Hospital Aintree, Ashworth Hospital, Chorley Hospital, Leigh Infirmary, Ormskirk General Hospital, Scott Clinic, St. Helens, Southport and Formby District General Hospital, Warrington Hospital, Whiston Hospital, Wrightington Wigan and Leigh Hospital.

And keeping in mind our Lord's words: 'I was in prison and you visited me,' receive this list of Her Majesty's Prisons:

Altcourse, Kennett, Liverpool, Garth, Hindley, Risley, Wymott

I share this with you so that you will all appreciate the reason why there are bound to be changes. Before they begin to take place I commend to you the Mass in the Cathedral on the feast of the Sacred Heart, 19th June, when we give thanks for priests this year celebrating 25, 40, 50 and 60 years of life and service as priests. The feast this year is the first day of the year commended to us by Pope Benedict, 'the Year of the Priesthood'. Everyone is welcome both to give thanks and to pray for the future. In particular, I urge anyone wondering, 'Should I offer to serve as a priest?' to come to that Mass.

There is another challenge those of you, who regularly come to Mass, share with me: those who do not come are often completely unaware of what is happening and become very angry when they approach a priest and find that what they had taken for granted is no longer there. The facts I put before you today need to be widely known, please do all you can to spread this word.

And finally today I commend the invitation set out powerfully by Pope John Paul II and endorsed by Pope Benedict: are we keeping the Lord's Day as we need to do in fidelity to him and in witness to others? I am often in the part of the City where Jewish people live on Saturday and I always note how different it feels as they keep the Sabbath. If I am near the Liverpool mosque on Friday again it is impossible not to notice how all roads lead in that direction. I cannot but wonder what is happening to Sunday.

I end with a prayer written for today's feast by St. Thomas Aquinas that, to my great joy, Pope Benedict quoted in his autographed letter to me for my Silver Jubilee:

O sacred banquet in which Christ is received; in which the memory of His passion is with us. Our deepest being is filled with grace and the foretaste of future glory is given to us.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Archbishop of Liverpool

**Ends
14 June 2009**