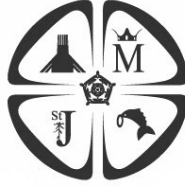


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PASTORAL LETTER

*To be read in all churches and chapels of the Archdiocese of Liverpool on
Sunday, 19 April 2009, the Second Sunday of Easter.*

My dear People,

The ring I wear is a copy of the one Pope Paul VI gave to Bishop Thomas Holland; he was my predecessor as Bishop of Salford. Pope Paul gave such a ring to all the Bishops who took part in the Second Vatican Council held in Rome in the 1960s.

The lesson I must receive every time I wear it is the same I must learn from that story we have just received about what happened, what was said on the evening of the first Easter Day and eight days later: that is today.

The ring has three people: the first is no surprise: Our Lord himself. But in any other context except the family of the followers of Jesus the other two would be very odd. One is Simon Peter: he denied the Lord three times. The other is Paul who as Saul fully endorsed the stoning of Stephen.

On my ring: two forgiven men. And today's story is all about that; to the ten who had denied, deserted him, he comes: he shows that by patience, forgiveness, mercy, he has made the wounds, inflicted on him by treachery, injustice, and barbarity, beautiful and an assurance of life beyond all power to destroy. And to the denier and deserter his word: 'Peace be with you'. And he sends these forgiven disciples to forgive sins in the power of the Spirit breathed from the depths of him who took all our darkness deep into himself.

And then Thomas adds insult to injury: he adds to desertion doubt and arrogance. In his pride he lays down conditions for the scourged, crowned, crucified Lord. And the risen Lord empties himself, humbles himself, and says 'Peace be with you, Thomas, I surrender to your demands: here for you my hands and side'.

So the Apostles and those to whom they handed on their commission from the Lord must bear witness to at least three resurrections:

first: Jesus who was crucified, died and was buried, on the third day rose again;

second: he is not only alive: he has taken hold of all that cruelty and hatred inflicted on him, and raised it all up in beauty and assurance of joy beyond all sadness;

third: he raised up the eleven; and surely he would have raised up the twelfth, Judas, if only he had not hardened his heart against forgiveness and reconciliation. He forgave them: raised them up: and sent them as forgiven to forgive: as risen to raise up.

I ask you, therefore, to do this: look at the posters in your church about a Novena of Prayer for Vocations to ordination as priests, as co-workers with the Bishop: as consistent, thoughtful, heralds of: he is risen: evil is transformed: we are forgiven.

Read the poster: and take part. And a second poster about Masses for enquirers: for those who wonder: 'is the Lord calling me'. For some of you, as I find more and more each year, that poster will open doors to repentance, challenge, joy and peace beyond all you can ever ask for or imagine. Without hesitation I say to you who are just wondering: Look at that poster and act.

We need priests to witness to the three resurrections, 'and to set free all those held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death'.

Do not rush past the posters.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P'.

Archbishop of Liverpool

Ends
19 April 2009