

Bishop's Letter for World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When we are given some good news, it is hard to keep it a secret. You have just found out that you have got the job you have been seeking for a long time; you have just been unexpectedly promoted; the exam that you thought you had flunked you have, in fact, passed with flying colours; the baby you were both hoping for is on the way. It is almost impossible to subdue that effervescent desire to spread the good news. We are bursting to tell someone.

Surely this should be the same when we realise that we have experienced the transforming touch of God's love. This is the fundamental inspiration for all Christian mission – *the love of Christ urges us on!* (Cor 5.14). This desire to go out and share the Good News with others flows from our Baptismal calling and is strengthened by the seal of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Pope Francis puts it very succinctly in his message for today, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations; *“by virtue of baptism, every Christian is a ‘Christopher’, a bearer of Christ, to his brothers and sisters. This is particularly the case with those called to a life of special consecration and with priests, who have generously responded, ‘Here I am, Lord, send me!’”*

However, if it were as simple as that to be a missionary Christian, there would be no hesitation on our part, would there? We know that Jesus was anointed and sent, chosen and empowered for his mission. Well, that goes for us too; we have been anointed and sent, hence the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, and thus we have been chosen and empowered. But it is a long journey, and success is a fruit that we do not too often encounter. That is why the Lord walks at our side, never abandoning us, encouraging us with his word and nourishing us with his presence in the Eucharist. A Christian is never alone. Again Pope Francis reminds us in his letter about the Joy of the Gospel: *“Jesus walks with (the Christian), speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise.”* (#266)

Returning a moment to our desire for success, to experience that our plans have worked, our efforts have been fruitful. Remember, it is God's Kingdom, they are his seeds that we are sowing, and it is he who will ultimately make them grow. If we are to have quiet, joyful confidence as spreaders of the Good News, then it is to him, who is the source of all good gifts, that we must look. Whatever we give to this great endeavour of mission, God will not be outdone in generosity.

The Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts through the sacramental life of the Church and the Spirit is the prime mover in the work of mission, without whom there can be no vocation, no mission, no anointing and no empowerment. The Spirit calls to each of us to open our lives to hear and follow the word of God. The Spirit leads us on to form an ever deeper, an ever closer friendship with Jesus in the Eucharist; it is here we meet him in the *“breaking of the bread”*.

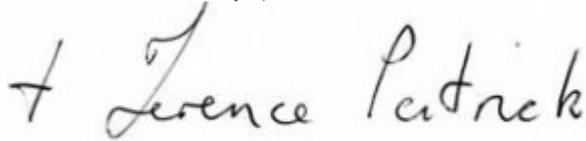
What I am going to ask you now, what the Holy Father asks of us all, you have heard before and there might be in the hearts of some of us the weary response, *“Not again, for goodness sake!”* However, it is what the Lord told us to do in the first place; *“Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.”* (Matt 9.38) Listen to the words of Pope Francis again as he speaks to each and every one of us listening here today. *“I ask parish communities, associations and the many prayer groups present in the Church, not to yield to discouragement but to continue praying that the Lord will send workers to his harvest. May he give us priests enamoured of the Gospel, close to all their brothers and sisters, living signs of God's merciful love.”*

I know that many parishes, communities and individuals already respond in this way. Thank you. However, I believe that regular Eucharistic Adoration will both raise our awareness of the need to focus on the missionary dimension of our Christian calling and, at the same time, help us

to encourage vocations of all kinds but especially vocations to the consecrated life and the priesthood. Eucharistic Adoration is for everyone, of all ages and backgrounds. Don't be afraid to invite others to come along, young and old, well versed in the faith and not so well versed. Meeting the Lord of life is what changes lives. Offering our lives in loving response to him is what brings us true happiness.

I end quoting once again from Pope Francis' message for the 54th World Day of Prayer for Vocations: *"Mary Most Holy, the Mother of our Saviour, had the courage to embrace this ideal, placing her youth and her enthusiasm in God's hands. Through her intercession, may we be granted that same openness of heart, that same readiness to respond, "Here I am", to the Lord's call, and that same joy in setting out (cf. Lk 1:39), like her, to proclaim him to the whole world."*

Yours in blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terence Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Bishop of Middlesbrough