



PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, 21/22 MARCH 2026

I am the resurrection and the life.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we welcome the Spring equinox when the hours of daylight begin to exceed those of darkness and night, the Church's calendar also marks a turning-point. The first four weeks of Lent have already passed quickly and in the coming two weeks, which the Church sometimes calls Passiontide, we begin to reflect more intensely in our prayers and liturgy on the Passion of Our Lord.

With Easter a fortnight away, we still have time to re-focus our Lenten efforts. There is no need to dwell on the opportunities we have missed this Lent for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Instead, we can choose today how to make the very best use of the time that is left to us, so that our celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord will be all the more joyful and fruitful.

In our prayer we can make a real effort to see every experience of Our Lord's passion as a gesture of his love for us - his betrayal by Judas - his abandonment by Peter - his trial and scourging - his entrusting of Our Lady to us as our mother - and his death on the cross. The sufferings of Christ are all expressions of God's infinite love for us. This is the *generous love* - in St John Henry Newman's words – *that He...the double agony in man for man should undergo.*

What can we offer in return? The best offerings we can make this Passiontide are acceptance and accompaniment of our Saviour on the painful but life-giving journey ahead. We can begin by accepting our lives as they are just now – the extraordinary gift of a generous God Who has made us to know, love and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next.

We can accompany our Saviour especially in those who suffer at this time within our own communities – and because of the unpredictable and destructive wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. We can echo in our prayer the recent words of Pope Leo: *On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East, and of all women and men of good will, I appeal to those responsible for this conflict: cease fire! May paths of dialogue be reopened! Violence can never lead to the justice, stability and peace for which the peoples are waiting.*

As Catholics we must cherish life. Our Lord has told us: *I am the way the truth and the life...I am the resurrection and the life.* Within our own Archdiocese we have been blessed for many years by the work and witness for life of the late Professor Jack Scarisbrick, who died recently – and who, together with his wife Nuala, founded the Life charity. Their example reminds us of how much good can be achieved in the span of a single lifetime.

Today's Gospel story encourages us on our pilgrim way through Lent. The turning-point for Lazarus is a foretaste of the Resurrection. Brought back to life, he was restored to his grieving sisters – and then, according to an Orthodox tradition, he travelled to Cyprus with Paul and Barnabas. St John's Gospel tells us that many of the Jews came to believe in Jesus because of Lazarus and his testimony.

The turning-points in our own lives may be far less dramatic – but the impact of our witness can be just as important. For all of us, Baptism or Reception into the Catholic Church are themselves the beginning of a new life of faith – and it was truly uplifting to welcome the greater number of catechumens and candidates coming forward in the Cathedral for this year's Rite of Election.

Another turning-point for many of our young people may be the recognition of a vocation - to ordained ministry or consecrated life. I ask the young people in your congregation: is Our Lord calling you to witness to him, as the resurrection and the life, by offering yourself in life-long service among the People of God?

Cardinal Newman heard the crucified Christ calling him through the experiences of his own life. In a beautiful reflection, from his sermon entitled the *Tears of Christ at the Grave of Lazarus*, he wrote: *Wherever faith in Christ is, there is Christ Himself. He said to Martha, "Believest thou this?" Wherever there is a heart to answer, "Lord, I believe," there Christ is present. Blessed be His name! nothing can rob us of this consolation: we will be as certain, through His grace, that He is standing over us in love, as though we saw Him. We will not, after our experience of Lazarus's history, doubt an instant that He is thoughtful about us.*

With my prayers for a blessed Holy Week - in company with our Saviour - and a joyful Easter to come.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ *Bernard Longley*

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on 17 March 2026 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (21/22 March 2026)