



PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
(16/17 NOVEMBER 2024)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When that time comes, your own people will be spared, all those whose names are found written in the Book.

The holy season of Advent will soon be upon us - a season of joyful anticipation. It represents the fulfilment of the Old Testament and God's ultimate promise at the end of time. It is our preparation once again to welcome Jesus, the Word of God, into our world.

As we move from one Church year into the next, God's living Word continually speaks to our hearts, challenging and consoling us. The Word of God is always familiar to us, yet it is always new, always offering new challenges and new consolation.

I am mindful, as Parliament prepares to debate the assisted dying bill, that the Word of God always informs our conscience, enabling us to discern what is true and what is good, especially about the dignity of human life. I hope that over recent weeks you have heard or read Cardinal Vincent's Pastoral Letter on this vital issue. He wisely reminds us: *be careful what you wish for; the right to die can become a duty to die; being forgetful of God belittles our humanity*. It is not too late to voice your own concerns by writing to your Member of Parliament this week.

This Advent, as we begin to listen to the readings at Mass, we will hear a new translation. The Catholic Church in England, Wales and Scotland has chosen to renew our Lectionary – and the most evident feature of this is that we shall hear from two new translations – a new translation of the Psalms from the Abbey Psalter - and a new translation of the rest of the Bible from the Catholic Edition of the English Standard Version.

There are several reasons for the renewal of the Lectionary.

First, it is part of a broader programme of revision, working through all of the Church's liturgical books.

Secondly, it was recognised that a more faithful translation of the Scriptures is available to us, replacing our present translations which have served us well for several decades. With the passage of time, scholarship and language both change and evolve.

Since the last revision of the Lectionary over 40 years ago, our Calendars have been updated several times, and now the celebrations and readings for new Saints can be included.

Those who proclaim the Word of God, especially at Sunday and Weekday Mass, will find the layout of the new books of readings, the Lectionary, much easier to read and proclaim the Word of God – and that benefits all of us.

If you have ever read or heard the Word of God proclaimed from a different translation of the Bible, you may have noticed that the changes from one translation to another are usually not very great. We realise that we are hearing the same passage. Even so, the differences do help us to reflect on the reading in a new way. I am very hopeful that the introduction of the English Standard Version for our liturgical celebrations will give us all - clergy and lay faithful - a renewed appreciation of the dynamic power of God's word in our lives.

As this new Church year begins I would encourage you to become familiar with the new translations by acquiring a new English Standard Version of the Bible for your home - or even downloading it on an App for your phone or tablet.

Please pray that those who proclaim the Word of God in our churches, schools and chaplaincies may do so with prayerful dignity - because worthy proclamation of God's Word strengthens faith.

This is also an opportunity for parishioners who have never exercised the ministry of proclaiming the Word of God to be prepared to do so. Please be generous in offering to exercise this important ministry, even if you need encouragement to overcome the initial hesitation.

I am very grateful to those who have donated towards the cost of the new Lectionaries that we shall use from the First Sunday of Advent, particularly where this is in thanksgiving or in memory of loved ones.

During the coming weeks we shall contemplate the fulfilment of all things, when the Word-made-flesh came in the person of Jesus and when we prepare for his Second Coming in glory. The Word of God is not a book but a Person - Jesus himself personally and really present to us. We thank him for the gift of life and for the faith that cherishes and enriches life. We thank him for the Word of God, freely proclaimed, gratefully heard and bearing fruit – fruit that will last.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ *Bernard Longley*

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on 9 November 2024 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (16/17 November 2024).