

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ



1st/2nd March 2014
8th Sunday of the Year

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today I write to thank you for all your good wishes and prayers for me on my becoming a member of the Sacred College of Cardinals. The ceremonies of last Saturday and Sunday were marvellous moments. They showed clearly the strength and breadth of our Catholic faith around the world. I was so moved to stand alongside eighteen other new Cardinals as we begin this new stage of our service of our beloved Lord and his Church. Please do continue to pray for me.

So many people, from different walks of life, different parts of our society, different religions, have expressed delight at the appointment of a new Cardinal in our country. I can only take this is a sign of their positive regard for our Catholic faith and the contribution we make to the well-being of our society. This is a time for us to be confidently Catholic.

It is also a time for us to be renewed in our sense of discipleship and mission.

Pope Francis' favourite way of speaking about the followers of Christ is to describe us as 'missionary disciples', people called by Jesus to be close to him and to share in the mission given him by the Father. Pope Francis spells out his message in his marvellous teaching document '*The Joy of the Gospel*'. In it he exclaims that the first fruit of being close to the Lord is an abiding sense of joy in the life we have been given. He insists that the experience of this joy is what moves us to show and share our faith by the way we live each day.

Today I ask you to make a real effort during Lent to get to know this vibrant message of Pope Francis, one which he illustrates in so many of his wonderful gestures. The Holy Father's document, '*The Joy of the Gospel*', is readily available on the Vatican website or from Catholic bookshops. It points out clearly the path we must take in the years ahead. We really must absorb it and take its vision to heart. I am confident that your parish will help you in this task during Lent with a variety of initiatives offered.

"The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" says Pope Francis in the very first line of his document. He continues, "Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew" *Evangelii Gaudium* (1). To each one of us the Holy Father writes: 'I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day' (3).

May Lent be “this very moment”: a season to meet Christ afresh, to accept again his offer of salvation and so be set free from sin. I am sure we can give a whole-hearted response to the Pope’s invitation. If we do, then our Lenten season will be a grace-filled time when joy is constantly born anew.

Pope Francis is so eloquent when writing about our faith. He describes the Gospel as 'a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life' (264), because, he says, 'the Gospel responds to our deepest needs since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters.' It is, he says, 'a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches the part of us which nothing else can reach' (265).

Then he says this:

'When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realise that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realise once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people' (268).

We are indeed to be his missionary disciples.

Today's readings tutor our hearts in readiness for this calling. The Gospel tells us 'to set our hearts first' on the Kingdom of our heavenly Father. Then other things begin to take their true place. The Psalmist calls on us to sing aloud and often: 'In God alone is my soul at rest' reminding us of where our true security is to be found. And St Paul urges us to be bold in speaking of our faith to others, fearing no judgement except that of God who, we well know, understands our inner-most intentions and is always merciful.

These are good times in which to rejoice in our faith. Let us make the most of this gift and of the astonishing leadership of Pope Francis. He points us always and only to Jesus, to our loving Lord and Saviour. Let us use this coming Lent to meet our Lord more nearly and love him more dearly so that we may truly be his missionary disciples, overflowing with joy.

Yours devotedly

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster