

## PASTORAL LETTER

### OF THE

**MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY  
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM**

**FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT  
24/25 FEBRUARY 2018**



*Jesus...led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last Sunday we began Lent by accompanying our Lord as he was driven into the desert for forty days by the Holy Spirit. Today we are invited to climb the mountain of the Transfiguration with the Lord and in company with the apostles Peter, James and John. It is poignant to recall that these are also the three companions that our Lord asked to stay beside him during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

When our Lord was in the wilderness, on the mountain-top or in the garden he found the solitude he needed to pray to his heavenly Father. Each of these three environments brought the Lord an opportunity to be close to the Father, at especially significant moments in his life, and to understand more clearly the pathway that now lay before him.

If you have seen Mount Tabor, the mountain of the Transfiguration, you will know that it offers a magnificent view across the countryside of Galilee. Mountains and hills open up a fresh vista of places that are familiar to us - they enable us to see them in a new way. When we climb up into the hills we sometimes gain a clearer vision of another landscape – the one that lies within us.

In the desert we are free from distractions, while on the mountain-top we gain a different perspective. In the scriptures the high places draw those who are called to encounter the presence of God. In today's first reading Abraham is drawn by God to a mountain in the land of Moriah. There on the mountain-side he is tested. There he is ready to sacrifice his beloved son: *your only child Isaac, whom you love*. And there his life is utterly changed as his destiny is revealed: *I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven*.

On Mount Tabor we see another beloved Son whose life was indeed sacrificed for love of us and to redeem us from our sins. We hear the Father's voice telling us: *This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him*. We also glimpse the glory that we are called to share in its fullness through the new life of Easter – and that we already experience today through the gift of our baptism into the Lord's dying and rising.

In our Archdiocese we are blessed with the natural beauty of many high places: the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire and the Roaches in the Staffordshire Moorlands; the Cotswolds in Oxfordshire and the Clent Hills or Barr Beacon nearer to Birmingham. We may think of the long walks that Blessed John Henry Newman took in the hills and the way that the landscape prompted him to contemplate the power of God leading him on *o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till the night is gone*. The views from these high places are exhilarating and they sometimes enable us to see more clearly the loving plan of our Creator for our own lives.

We may not be able to head for the heights in a literal sense this Lent, but we can ask our Lord to lift up our hearts to help us reflect on our lives and map out the pathway before us more accurately. Whenever we pray before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament this Lent we ascend Mount Tabor and we have our own experience of the Transfiguration. In our Lord's real presence we begin to see ourselves as he sees us: both loved by God and in need of his forgiveness.

Next Thursday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, I invite you to join me in a Novena of prayer during the nine days leading up to this year's Twenty-Four Hours for the Lord on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of March. In each deanery there will be an opportunity to pray together before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

During the Novena I am asking you to pray for the canonisation of Blessed Dominic Barberi, the Passionist priest who received Blessed Cardinal Newman into the Catholic Church. I can never forget that it was Blessed Dominic who first absolved Blessed John Henry of his sins and who celebrated the Mass at Littlemore at which he first received our Lord in Holy Communion. As Blessed John Henry Newman's own canonisation surely draws closer I ask him to support our prayers for Blessed Dominic to be recognised as a saint.

May these two holy friends accompany us on our pilgrimage through Lent. May we follow them into the presence of God until our lives, like theirs, are transformed through the light of the risen Christ.

*Blessed John Henry Newman.....Pray for us.*

*Blessed Dominic Barberi.....Pray for us.*

With my prayers and every blessing for a holy and fruitful Lent ahead.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Bernard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Bernard Longley  
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the 21 February 2018 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Second Sunday of Lent, 24/25 February 2018.