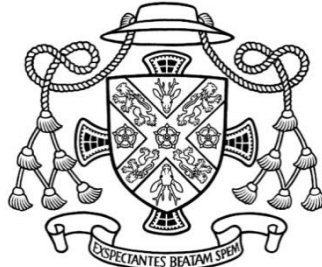


Pastoral Letter
Of
Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

[Feast of the Holy Family](#)

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today, the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, we begin the celebration of the opening of the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025. At the Cathedral a cross will be carried into the Church. The cross has been brought from its usual location, the Lady Chapel at Osmotherley, and then presented to the cathedral congregation, who represent all of us, the faithful people of the Diocese of Middlesbrough. This particular cross has a compelling history, which recommends it as a symbol for the Jubilee in our diocese.

Many of you will have visited the Lady Chapel at Osmotherley. It is the principal Marian Shrine of our diocese. The seventeenth-century statue of the Madonna and Child, which came to adorn the chapel after its completion, was presented by Lady Magdalen Eldon. The Eldon Family, together with the Scrope Family have supported the Shrine throughout the years.

A very moving story lies behind the carved wooden crucifix normally located above the altar at Osmotherley which Lady Eldon also gave. While visiting Germany in the early years of Hitler's regime, she saw the crucifix, admired it in an antiques shop, and approached the proprietor. He offered it to her as a free gift, if she would procure his freedom and passage out of Germany - for he was a Jew. This she duly did. It thus hangs as a precious symbol of liberation for all to see.

Perhaps to some, it might seem a little incongruous that in the midst of our Christmas celebrations, the shadow of the cross should loom. However, just look back at the feasts that surround the celebration of Christmas; St Stephen on the day after Christmas, the first follower of Jesus to shed his blood in witness, as a martyr; the Holy Innocents on 28th who died in the place of Christ; 29th would normally be the feast of St Thomas Becket, the great English martyr venerated throughout the whole of Europe and beyond. Even as Jesus is born in the manger at Bethlehem, already

this sequence of events makes us aware of how closely life and death, Christmas and Easter, Bethlehem and Golgotha, the Manger and the Cross are bound together.

St Luke in his account of the infancy of Jesus tells us that immediately after the birth, Mary “*wrapped* Jesus in swaddling clothes and *laid* him in a manger” (Luke 2:7). Luke uses the same two words later on in his gospel, after the death of Jesus. On Good Friday, Jesus’ body was *wrapped* in a linen shroud and *laid* in the tomb (Luke 23:53).

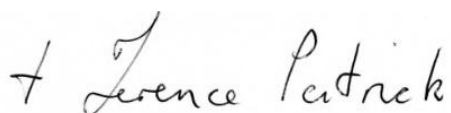
Venerable Fulton J Sheen, the American bishop, theologian, spiritual writer and broadcaster reminds us in his book, *Life of Christ*: “It was not so much that (Jesus’) birth cast a shadow on His life, and thus led to His death; it was rather that the Cross was there from the beginning, and it cast its shadow backward to His birth. Ordinary mortals go from known to the unknown submitting themselves to forces beyond their control; hence we can speak of their “tragedies.” But He went from the known to the known, from the reason for His coming, namely, to be “Jesus” or “Saviour,” to the fulfilment of His coming, namely, the death on the Cross.” (Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*, 30)

So, it is absolutely right that we should indeed begin our celebration of the Jubilee Year by focusing on the cross for by his cross and resurrection Christ has set us free. It is for us the means of redemption; it is the instrument of our liberation.

As we contemplate this Ordinary Jubilee Year and its meaning for each of us and our world, may we look to the Cross and be filled with a hope that does not disappoint (Rom 5:5). And we pray:

Father, you are the hope that does not disappoint and the beginning and end of all things; bless the start of our pilgrim journey behind the glorious cross of your Son in this time of grace; bind up the wounds of hearts that are broken, loosen the chains that hold us slaves of sin and prisoners of hatred and grant your people the joy of the Spirit so that they may walk with renewed hope towards their longed-for destiny, Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

In blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Patrick".

Bishop of Middlesbrough

To be read and made available on the Weekend of 28/29 December 2024