PASTORAL LETTER FOR FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - VOCATIONS TO THE ORDAINED PRIESTHOOD
28TH/29TH NOVEMBER 2026

Today, on this First Sunday of Advent, a new liturgical year begins. It is a season of hope and joyful anticipation. We turn our thoughts to the coming of Jesus Christ: as the eternal Son of God who came in flesh born of the Virgin Mary; who comes to us now through faith and in the sacraments of the Church; and who will come again at the end of time to renew all things.

In the second reading, from his First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul reminds us about the "grace of God that was given [us] in Christ Jesus" and which called us "into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."[i] This grace is given to us by our rebirth in the sacrament of baptism and the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation; it is the grace which incorporates all the baptised into the fellowship, the communion, of Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

In our three Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough and Hallam, we need all the baptised to recognise and exercise their calling to be a holy priesthood. The call to holiness is the primary vocation of us all. All those baptised and confirmed are given spiritual gifts and charisms to help them build up the fellowship of Christ's body, the Church; to offer spiritual sacrifices to God and "by their holy actions …consecrate the world itself to God."[ii]

Nevertheless, today as much as ever, we need the ministerial priesthood, comprised of priests and bishops, who are at the service of the priesthood of all believers. It is from the fellowship of the Church that the Lord in his providence calls ordinary men to that extraordinary service.

Across our three Dioceses today and over the coming months, you will see posters and banners displaying the words, 'The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus' and inviting men to consider whether they too could be an ordained priest. The words are a quotation from St John Mary Vianney, the Patron Saint of Parish Priests, and remind us that it is from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus that the gift of the ordained priestly ministry originates.

In today's first reading, the Prophet Isaiah teaches us that God is our Father and we are his children: "You, O Lord, are our Father … we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."[iii] At the centre of Christ's gospel, is the revelation of God's fatherhood. Christ taught his disciples to pray "Our Father". He revealed to his apostles: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father". [iv] Christ is therefore the icon of God the Father, "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation".[v]

Those who are called to be ordained priests, are called to be icons of Christ the Eternal High Priest[vi] and to share in the outpouring of the divine fatherhood from his Sacred Heart[vii]. By sacramental grace, they are called to a very specific kind of spiritual fatherhood and, like the Apostles, to be generous, courageous and willing to offer up their lives in the service of God's holy people; to be priests "with the love of the heart of Jesus".

The need of our Dioceses for more priests arises not from a shortage of vocations to the priesthood; the Lord always calls enough men for the needs of his Church. The shortage is in responses to his call! This may be because some men are confused about what a "call" from the Lord actually is; others may not recognize it or have been discouraged by family or friends from responding to it, or some may feel they are perhaps unworthy of being called.

In the opening prayer of today's Mass, we prayed for the resolve, "to run forth to meet … Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand" we "may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom." And, in today's Gospel passage from St Mark, the Lord instructs us to: "Be on guard, keep awake" – in other words, be alert and ready to hear and act upon Christ's words.

I now call any man, young or not so young, who is listening to, or reading, this pastoral letter, to be alert and ready to consider this question: "Could you be a priest?" Could the start of this Advent be a moment for you to respond to God's call and for you "to run forth and meet Christ" in a new way? If you think that this could be the call you need, I invite you to meet* with me and some other priests to gently explore what may as yet simply be a thought in your mind or a stirring in your soul.

I ask all the lay faithful, consecrated men and women, and clergy to pray not just today but every day, through the intercession of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, that the Lord will send labourers into his harvest, and that he will grant an abundance of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life to our Dioceses and throughout the world.

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds
Apostolic Administrator of Middlesbrough
Apostolic Administrator of Hallam

* *The meeting is open to unmarried men who are under the age of 55 years (because of the length of seminary training, men over this age are not generally accepted for formation). Those attending this meeting will be able to ask any questions they might have about a vocation to the priesthood. The meeting will take place on Thursday 17th December 2026 and be for a period of about an hour from 6:30pm to 7:30pm. Tea and coffee will be available from 6:00pm. The meeting will be held at Hinsley Hall, 62 Headingley Lane, Leeds, LS6 2BX. If you intend to come to the meeting, I kindly ask you to let Fr Simon Lodge know in advance by 15th December 2026, either by email: vocations@dioceseofleeds.org.uk or telephone: 01274 872984 (a message can be recorded if no one is available to take your call). If you are unable to attend this meeting but would like to learn more, please use the same details above to contact Fr Simon, whatever the diocese in which you reside.*

Given on 19th November 2026, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough and Hallam, on the 1st Sunday of Advent, 28th and 29th November 2026.

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[i] Second Reading - 1 Corinthians 1:3-9.
[ii] Catechism of the Catholic Church, §901.
[iii] First Reading – Isaiah.
[iv] John 14:9.
[v] Colossians 1:15.
[vi] *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §12, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Second Vatican Council (1965).
[vii] Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the 'Dies Natalis' of the Curé of Ars, 2009.