



PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
MOST REVEREND BERNARD LONGLEY
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
FOR THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
(21/22 SEPTEMBER 2024)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

They had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.

In today's Gospel the apostles show how human they are - yet there is something to be admired in aspiring to greatness. Every human being is called to be great.

But Jesus describes greatness as God sees it. It is in service, sacrifice, welcoming the most vulnerable. It is reminiscent of St Paul writing to the Corinthians and telling them to *be ambitious*. Paul is urging the people of Corinth (and us) to aspire to greatness - but he warns that this doesn't come with the eloquence of angels or even with a faith that can move mountains but rather in love. He uses a particular word for love. In Latin it is Caritas - and Agape in Greek.

It is the love that we show in service, in putting others before ourselves. That's why it is the very word used to describe the Church's work with those in need – Caritas.

All over the Archdiocese there are individuals and parishes who express this Caritas - sacrificial love - by welcoming the vulnerable - opening their doors to people who are lonely, bereaved, people with dementia, those with disabilities or special needs, others suffering with food poverty, by visiting the sick and prisoners and helping people with addictions. These are all signs of parishes living out that call to greatness, through service.

In his first letter to the faithful, Pope Benedict chose to write about Caritas. Here he describes the Church's rich history of care for those in need:

*The exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. **The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word.***

Pope Benedict also wrote: *As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.*

In the Archdiocese we are blessed to have an agency that does precisely that. All its resources are dedicated to the service of people who are homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, people with disabilities and special needs, care of the elderly and vulnerable young people. We see this work going on in projects all over the Archdiocese.

I am, of course, referring to Father Hudson's Care, which is always looking for ways to do more. But this can only be done with the prayers and support of every parish. Father Hudson's is a key agency of Caritas but every Christian and every parish is co-responsible for this. Every parish church is surrounded by people crying out for this love. Sometimes it is hard to respond - maybe we don't know how or we feel we don't have the resources.

This partly explains why the Archdiocese and Father Hudson's have decided to entrust the development of Caritas to the care of Father Hudson's. Father Hudson's has the experience and networks to help every parish to develop this ministry as part of our diocesan vision.

We have been blessed with generous financial support from our schools to fund a post which will focus on supporting parishes. This work will involve sharing ideas and good practise, helping to recruit parish volunteers and offer training, while working in partnership with other churches and charities – so that we can develop our care for those in need.

So, from now on, Father Hudson's name will reflect all this as Father Hudson's Caritas.

Changing a name and employing a worker will only bear fruit when our parishes respond to the words of the Gospel. I am grateful that in many parishes there are already SVP, Justice and Peace and other social action groups undertaking this work.

But with the Jubilee Year approaching - with its focus on Luke chapter 4 where Jesus says he has come to *proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free* - I invite every parish to look towards developing one new project to help people in need.

Today, please help Father Hudson's Caritas with your prayers and through your generous financial support. Pray especially that all our parishes will see how we can meet the needs of disadvantaged people in our communities.

It the Lord's a call to service - but also his call to greatness. May he bless you as you reach out with his love.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ *Bernard Longley*

✠Bernard Longley
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on 19 September 2024 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Archdiocese on the Twenty-Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time (21/22 September 2024)