



A LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER

On Prayer for Pope Francis

To be read at all Masses on the First Sunday of Lent

9th March 2025

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today we join with so many across the world in prayer for Pope Francis. As the Church at the beginning prayed unceasingly for the Apostle Peterⁱ, so we now pray for the Pope as the Successor of Peter. We pray aware of the immense responsibility entrusted to Peter's successors, which Saint John Henry Newman described as "*a glorious apostolate, a tremendous weight, a ministry involving momentous duties, innumerable anxieties and immense responsibilities*"ⁱⁱ. Yet, in these past weeks we have intensified our prayer for the Pope in time of sickness and frailty. Pope Francis has spoken of his gratitude writing: "*I feel all your affection and closeness*" in prayer rising from many hearts, "*I feel I am carried and supported by all God's people.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

On Ash Wednesday, it was wonderful to see so many people come together to begin the prayer and penance of Lent, just as we will soon come together for the Chrism Mass at Saint Anthony's, Wythenshawe, in Holy Week. It is a visible reminder of how all our lives are bound together, above all, in the struggle for holiness. I often remind you that we come to Mass each Sunday not only for ourselves and our own salvation – as urgent as this is! We come to Mass for all those in our lives who need our prayer, our continuing conversion by the confession of our sins, and our ever-deeper union with Christ in the Mystery of His Eucharist.

The Church speaks of this beautiful reality as "the communion of saints." The Catechism explains: "*Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others*"^{iv}. Pope Francis reflects on this wonderful truth insisting: "*The Church is the communion of saints*"^v. *What a beautiful definition this is!*" says Pope Francis, "*The image of the Body of Christ immediately makes us understand what this means to be bound to one another in communion: If one member suffers,' writes Saint Paul, 'all suffer together, and if one member is honoured, all rejoice together*"^{vi}."

Saint John Vianney, the greatest of Parish Priests, expressed wonder reading the Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent^{vii}. For he saw in Christ's struggle in the wilderness the assurance that in every struggle our Redeemer desires to be with us, *"leading the way and assuring us of victory"*^{viii}. The Cure of Ars likewise sought to be close to all entrusted to his care through his own prayer and fasting, and in the long hours he made himself available in the Confessional. Saint John Paul II said, in this way he desired *"to love God for those who did not love him, and even to do the penance they would not do"*^{ix}.

Pope Francis explains what such spiritual and pastoral accompaniment means when he reflected, we: *"cannot be indifferent to others because we are all parts of one body in communion. In this sense even the sin of an individual person always affects everyone, and the love of each individual person affects everyone... By virtue of the communion of saints, of this union, every member of the Church is bound to me in a profound way. I don't say "to me" because I am the Pope – we are bound reciprocally... and this bond is so strong it cannot be broken even by death"*^x.

Today, we wish to so accompany Pope Francis, not merely by our thoughts nor even by the affection in which we hold every Pope, but above all by our prayers. Together with all who pray the Rosary night after night on the steps of Saint Peter's, we commend him to the protection of Our Lady who accompanies each one of us on our earthly pilgrimage.^{xi} As Pope Francis himself prayed at the beginning of his pontificate: *"My prayer for all of us is that the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, may grant us the grace to walk, to build, to confess Jesus Christ crucified. So may it be"*^{xii}.

United with Pope Francis in this prayer,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Acts 12: 5

ⁱⁱ Sermon "The Pope and the Revolution" 7th October 1866

ⁱⁱⁱ Angelus Address 2nd March 2025

^{iv} St. Thomas Aquinas quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 947

^v CCC No. 946

^{vi} Cf. I Cor 12: 26-27

^{vii} Lk. 4: 1-13

^{viii} Selected Sermons, The First Sunday of Lent

^{ix} The reference is to "Pope John Paul II "Letter to my Brother Priests" 1986

^x Catechesis of the Holy Father on Saint Joseph, 2nd February 2022

^{xi} Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council No. 62

^{xii} First Mass with the College of Cardinals, 14th March 2013