



**Pastoral Letter
Third Sunday of Easter
23 April 2023
Pilgrims of Hope**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The scriptures we have listened to today are full of new life. We heard something of what St Peter shared with the people of Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday morning. Gone is the disciple who wept and hid himself because he had disowned knowledge of Jesus on three occasions. Now we hear the apostle Peter fearlessly convicted of the truth that Jesus who was crucified, is now risen again in glory. This message is confirmed by the words written in the first letter of St Peter. Through baptism into faith, we are invited to share this new life ourselves. And then we listened together to the Gospel of Emmaus. This powerful account of the resurrection is shown in the lives of two disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and his companion.

The first scene of the story presents us with something of the suffering and incredulity of these two disciples. They are broken-hearted. The risen Lord came to them and walked by their side. We had some experience of this in 2021 during our gracious listening and gracious speaking. This was the diocesan stage of the forthcoming synod about becoming a synodal Church. We were invited to reflect on four questions: What does it mean to be Catholic? What are some of your experiences of the Church doing something well? What are some of your experiences of when things have not gone so well? What is your dream for the Church? It was clear from listening to the listening, some find themselves in a similar place to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They struggle to make sense of the Church. They feel disheartened. They are yearning for a Church which is more outward-looking and full of missionary energy. Like the risen Lord, we need to find ways to accompany the many who would like to walk from grief to grace.

Since that time of listening, and throughout the next stage of the Church's synodal journey, we have been thinking about how we might respond to dreams and aspirations. We want to be a diocese that can proclaim in the bold language of the Acts of the Apostles, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'. In the Gospel of Emmaus, we heard of the dialogue between the risen Lord and his two friends. It is a conversation in which Jesus opens their hearts to the meaning of the scriptures. This is the place where we find the truth. Later Cleopas and his companion are able to say, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

After the initial conversations around the diocese, five working parties were established by our diocesan office of synodality:

- the role and life of the priest in a post-pandemic Church
- finances, properties and material resources of the diocese
- lay engagement in diocesan decision-making
- the role of women and their ministry in the life of the diocese
- how we reach out to marginalised groups to hear their recommendations for better engagement

My Lenten Pastoral Letter was an opportunity to mention our forthcoming diocesan Assembly, *Pilgrims of Hope*. This will be held at Thornton College on Saturday, 15th July. There will be an opportunity for us to reflect on these five themes and more. We are very blessed that the Assembly is fully funded by a generous donor. Please join with me in praying that this gathering will be a real encounter with the risen Lord in communion, participation and mission. One thing is for sure. We will know our Assembly has been successful if it leads to the mission energy we heard of at the end of today's Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. We can easily sum up the themes of the five working groups in one overarching mystery of our faith. Being a Catholic means belonging to a missionary community. If this message is not communicated, we have seriously failed.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ *David*

Bishop of Northampton

Given at Northampton on Sunday 16th April,
Divine Mercy Sunday

and appointed to be read or distributed in all churches and chapels of the
Diocese on the Third Sunday of Easter, 22nd and 23rd April, 2023