

Vocations Awareness Week
Twenty-Third Sunday of the Year
Pastoral Letter

To be read and/or distributed on Sunday, 10th September 2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

This Sunday, we begin our celebration of *Vocations Awareness Week* in Scotland. It is a time when we are encouraged to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the consecrated life.

Our Gospel this Sunday tackles the difficult issue of how a Christian community should deal with internal problems and disputes. At first, the answer seems a bit obtuse and legalistic, at least to our modern ears. A bit of reflection on the LORD's advice to the community, however, opens up a horizon of love and compassion.

At the heart of the LORD's instruction is a reminder that we need to be a caring community; a community that cares for any person in difficulty and that cares for the truth that alone can set them free.

A community that cares about the person and cares about the truth. Might I suggest that this simple maxim, drawn from our Gospel, is a concise yet powerful description of a life of service in the Church.

Our priests, your priests, are called and chosen to **care for each and every person**, to respond to every human need wherever and however they encountered it. Following the example of Jesus Himself, our priests seek out the lost, offer guidance to the young, forgive sinners and offer comfort to the sick, the dying and the bereaved. From the beginning to the end of our lives they offer us direction, meaning and compassion.

Our Priests are also called and chosen to **care for the truth**. In a time of uncertainty, confusion and anxiety, they are witnesses of GOD's presence and His promise in our world. Faithful to a life of prayer, their priestly

ministry reminds the world that GOD's Word lasts forever, is always faithful and is ever inspiring of new ways of hope.

Our *Vocations Awareness Week* is a precious opportunity for recalling the wonder of GOD's call to serve His People, and of gratitude for all of those who said Yes down the years. This week I hope you and your parish communities will *pray* for vocations to the Priesthood, Diaconate and Religious life, and *encourage* all those engaged in ministry in your community, and finally that our young people may be given time and space to *discern* if they are called to these special vocations in the life of the Church.

May the prayer that Pope Saint Paul VI composed for the first *World Day of Prayer for Vocations* accompany us on our journey: "*O Jesus, Divine Shepherd of souls, You called the Apostles and made them fishers of men. Continue to draw to Yourself ardent and generous souls from among the young, in order to make them Your followers and Your ministers. Give them a share in Your thirst for the redemption of all... Open before them the horizons of the entire world. By responding to Your call, may they prolong Your mission here on earth, build up your Mystical Body, which is the Church, and be 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world'.*"

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and the Lady of Paisley watch over you and protect you.

With the assurance of my prayers and blessings,



Bishop John Keenan