



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Pastoral Letter of the Right Reverend John Arnold Bishop of Salford

To be read and distributed in all Parishes on the weekend of 16th/17th November

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On a recent Sunday, in our second reading at Mass, we heard the words of the letter to the Hebrews: "The Word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword, but more finely." (Hebrews 4:12) Allowing God to speak to us is one of the most important parts of any Mass, indeed the Second Vatican Council reminded us that Jesus "is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church." (SC 7)

Every time you come to Mass, or other services in church, an important place is given to readings from the Bible. From the beginning of December, the First Sunday of Advent, you might notice some slight changes in those readings. The Dioceses of England and Wales are adopting a different translation of those Bible passages. We will still hear the same readings but the translation from the original Greek and Hebrew will be different in places. This will apply to what we hear and also to what we read in the missalettes, Mass books or missals, used in many of our parishes.

Over many years since the 1960s we have become familiar with The Jerusalem Bible translation. Why do we need a different translation? There is no such thing as a perfect translation. Every translation has its advantages and its shortcomings. Some seek to capture the original text in contemporary, modern, even simple language. Others seek to stick more closely with a word for word translation so that we hear in our own language what the original writers wrote. This is the method generally used in the new translation. Both these methods have their limits and shortcomings. No translation or method will ever be beyond criticism.

There is no suggestion that we should abandon other translations of the bible for our own reading and prayer. This introduction of the new Lectionary provides us with an opportunity that can enrich our spiritual lives. While some very familiar texts may be changed, the purpose of communicating the message of the scriptures remains the priority. Indeed, many passages will seem more appealing for those changes, causing us to contemplate the Word of God in a more helpful and challenging way. We may have become a little over-familiar with some passages and hearing them afresh in a new translation might bring new insights for hearers, readers and preachers alike.

Can I take this opportunity to thank those in our churches who carry out the ministry of Reader. The Church teaches that when the readings are proclaimed at Mass, it is God himself who speaks to God's people. Yours is a true ministry which is to be valued. I hope you will use this ministry to grow in your own love of the Scriptures.

Finally, St Jerome, who himself seventeen hundred years ago translated the Bible into the language of the people, wrote that 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.' I encourage you to read the daily readings or a chapter of the Gospel each day at home, or to meet together in your parishes and groups of parishes to come to know the Bible more deeply. Maybe parish meetings might begin with some time listening to the following Sunday's Gospel.

I am sure that the new Lectionary can provide us all with encouragement and challenge in our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, helping us to know the history of God's plan and presence in our lives, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the way we live our lives each day.

"Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey"

With my prayers and blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+John". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+John Arnold
Bishop of Salford

Tel: 0161 794 2825

bishop@dioceseofsalford.org.uk (bishop) marie.sartini@dioceseofsalford.org.uk (PA)
Salford Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered Charity