



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 27th/28th September 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for all that you contributed to the initial phase of the Synod. This important initiative begun by Pope Francis is clearly endorsed by Pope Leo. The early phase asked us to establish the priorities facing the universal Church in these changing and challenging times. We must now establish and implement policies for our Diocese.

We have called together teams of people who will help us to focus on the key areas identified during our *Big Listen* events: Community and Outreach, Leadership and Collaboration, Spirituality and Formation, Young People and Schools, and Inclusion. It is hoped that by the First Sunday of Advent we will have some concrete proposals for implementation. We have already begun an exercise which will call together all the priests and deacons of the Diocese, enabling them to share with each other priorities for their ministry and service.

At the heart of all we do must be our relationship with Jesus who, through his gift of the Holy Spirit, calls us into a loving union with him and with each other – this is the basis of our Synodal journey. The prayer of St Richard of Chichester sums it up: 'to know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly day by day'. And so I would like to share with you some brief reflections on the Jesus we meet in the Gospels.

Jesus was a mystic, a contemplative. His baptism was a mystical experience, giving his life a decisive direction. The transfiguration manifested his union with the Father, and his prayer inspired his teaching, integrated his activity and focussed his energies.

Jesus was a prophet, recognised as such by the people who heard him speak and who witnessed his healing ministry. Through his activity and preaching Jesus revealed a God of faithful and compassionate love, a God who freely reaches out to draw people into the circle of His life and love. His compassion is shown in his miracles of healing and especially in the parables of the compassionate Samaritan and the prodigal son.

Jesus is the prophet of service. At a time when rank, status, and prestige, were particularly relevant in the culture of the world, Jesus spoke of service and acted with humility. At the Last Supper he washed his disciples' feet, a gesture of humble and generous service, turning current ways of thinking and living upside down. Even as the Messiah, Jesus understands himself as a servant.

Jesus welcomed everyone and turned no-one away. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, spoke with, and healed, Gentiles and foreigners. A characteristic of his ministry is what we call inclusion. This habit provoked raised eyebrows and critical comment, but of those who he welcomed, many saw their lives transformed.

Jesus also saw himself as the Good Shepherd, following the Old Testament tradition of understanding God as the shepherd of His people. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd shows care in searching for it, and joy in finding it again. He describes how the shepherd knows each of his sheep by name and gives his life for them.

The death of Jesus on Calvary is the final expression of his self-giving, the great revelation of his love and the love of the Father. As the Risen Lord he gathers together his despairing disciples and renews his teaching, commissioning them to go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News. He promises them the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the Jesus of our lives. We are his contemporary disciples. This is the Jesus who stays with us on all our journeys.

The implementation process of the Synod has begun with our clergy, but the invitation is to everyone to help discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the universal Church and to the family of the Diocese of Salford. We will continue to listen to each other and learn how we are to witness to the Good News.

This is the time for all members of the Church, clergy and lay, man or woman, young or old, married, single or divorced, of whatever sexuality, to take up the command of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel in all parts of their everyday lives – to be missionary disciples. It will require prayer, respect, and listening so that we can chart the way ahead.

As Pope Leo says, 'Synodality speaks to us of a road ahead for where there is the Spirit, there is movement, a journey to be made. We are a people on the move. This does not set us apart but unites us to humanity'.

Stay with us, Lord, on our Journey

With my prayers and blessing

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name 'John' in a cursive script.

+John Arnold
Bishop of Salford

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