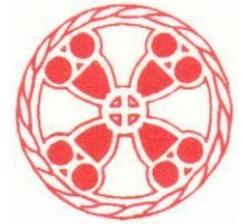


## PASTORAL LETTER 6



from Bishop Jonathan Goodall  
to the parishes and clergy of the See of Ebbsfleet

1 October 2020

Dear brothers and sisters, Dear friends,

Seven or eight of the over 12 million copies of the *Just William* books sold in the UK alone have ended up in our house. The stories gave endless laughter on long family car journeys. I'm sure that one way or another many of you have shared them too. In one of the stories the ever-mischievous William, had to recite a poem in a pageant. But embarrassed in public he can only summon up a single verse on stage: "Little deeds uh' kindness, little words uh' love, make our erf an Eden, like th' 'eaven above." May be it's a bit lacking in spiritual depth, and I hope it's not too childish for some of you, but it's not a bad summary – from a *very* unlikely source – of the attitude we see in the saints of the 'Little Way', who show us the way of holiness in the *smallest things* of life – chief among them perhaps St Thérèse of Lisieux on whose feast, 1 October, I write to you for this month.

The *ordinariness* of their holiness reminds us how very odd most of our human life is. Even at the best of times it's off-centre, abnormal, not doing what we were meant to do, not being what we were made to be, not being touch with the beauty and the glory of God's presence in and around us, which should be natural for us, and which one day – by the grace of Jesus Christ – will be natural for us again in heaven.

All of this is very relevant of course to the way we live now. By all accounts, from official and unofficial sources, we are all looking at a very difficult autumn and winter. We British are not alone or unique, of course! We must remember that some nations are having a worse experience, with less resilient public services. Most terrible of all perhaps is the Syrian experience, where the virus has compounded the layer upon layer of conflict and civil and economic disaster that has befallen them from within, and without, including international sanctions which are hitting only the poorest. I had the opportunity last week to talk to Syriac Patriarch Ephrem, and his descriptions made very painful listening. *Please do not let the Christians of Syria and Lebanon fall out of your prayers.*

In our own country, we shall have to continue for the foreseeable future to try to follow all the best advice we can to reduce the risk of transmission of the disease. We have all discovered that these are mainly repeated *little acts* of awareness and forethought – 'Little deeds uh' kindness' – washing hands, not getting too close to people we don't live with, sanitizing what we touch, wearing a mask despite the discomfort. They're small, but they are real, effective, and kind, which is after all a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5.22-23). And we shall need to persevere with repeated *little words* of encouragement to one another in the midst of all our worries, and in the isolation (from one another, from contact, and from normality) which intensifies and distorts our thoughts and feelings. Whether we are talking to one another as Christians, or whether we are talking to non-Christians or non-believers, whether at home or outside, they should be *words of faith, words of healing and hope and in some cases words of courage* – 'Little words uh' love' – rather than the sharing of cold resignation, or mere optimism, or angry frustration.

And I cannot underline too much how important it is that '*you do not cease to meet together*' as the apostle Paul repeatedly says in his letters. Where our churches are open, they are open *because* they are Covid-secure venues, and PCCs are working to keep them so. If you read this and you remain frightened to attend the Eucharist, or are unable because of age or another health condition, then be creative, go to a mid-week Mass, or ask for an extra weekly celebration for those who need to shield themselves, or ask your parish priest for arrangements for the Eucharist to be brought to you. All these things are possible, and can be done in a safe way. What is impossible is for Christians to survive on the way of holiness, to live the life of heaven, in all the little acts of daily life, which are becoming so prominent in all our lives, and not receive what Christ wants to give us, and what he has commanded his apostles to feed his people with. I have also added again here a reminder of the daily gospel passages for this month. There are many materials that can

support you in reading them; but there is no substitute for simply prayerfully and slowly reading each passage. I'm sure that you do not want to hear, any more than I do, the words of Jesus, 'You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.' This daily reading is also a way of building up our life together in prayer and faithfulness during our present difficulties.

St Therese began her life very frustrated. As a 15-year old she wanted to be a missionary, but her health wouldn't allow it. And she found it very hard to find her place in the Church, and she write movingly in her autobiography:

I persevered in reading [the Scriptures – she was reading 1 Corinthians 12 and 13] and I *didn't let my mind wander* until I found this encouraging theme: 'Set your desires on the better gifts. And I will show you the way which surpasses all others.' [ch 12.31] St Paul tells us that the greater gifts are nothing at all without love, and that this same love is surely *the best path* leading directly to God. At length I had found peace of mind.

When I had looked upon the body of the Church, I had not recognized myself in any of the members [apostles, prophets, teachers etc] which St Paul described. ... I knew that the Church had a body composed of various members. And I also knew that the Church had a *heart*, and that such a heart appeared to be *aflame with love*. I understood that the heart urges the members of the Church to action. And if this love were *extinguished*, there would be no apostles to proclaim, there would be no martyrs to shed their blood, [there would be none of the any of the works or ministries of the Church]. I understood that love contains all the vocations within itself; love embraces all times and places, it is, in a word, eternal.

Then, overcome with joy in my soul, I proclaimed: "O Jesus, my love! at last I have found my calling: my call is love. I have found my place in the Church, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its goal.

She died of course, in her convent, after only nine years as a nun, at the age of 24.

I want to leave the last word to another priest. It's the marvellous testimony of Fr Jacques Hamel, the priest who you may remember was murdered as he celebrated Mass in Rouen in 2016. At 85 he did not expect to be a martyr. He wrote in his last October parish letter: 'Do not think holiness is not for us! It does not necessarily mean doing extraordinary things.' And for his example he pointed to Louis and Zélie Martin the *parents* of St Thérèse (whom by Pope Francis had just declared saints). 'Their life was simple', he said, 'like *many* families. But their whole existence was oriented towards the kingdom of Heaven. Their only desire was 'to serve God first. ... They experienced painful circumstances, but they were nourished by the sacraments and prayer, the service of the poor, and self-abandonment to a God who *never ceases* to support us.' 'By our *baptism*', said Fr Hamel, 'we are sons and daughters of God. It is by *living* this relationship, day by day, that we become saints.'

I trust that gives food for thought, and a support for your hope until All Saints Day.

I remain yours devotedly,



### DAILY GOSPEL PASSAGES FOR OCTOBER

*These are the daily Gospels for the Eucharist, which you can make the centre of your daily prayer. To learn more about reading the scriptures prayerfully, buy Enzo Bianchi's, 'Lectio Divina: from God's Word to Our Lives' (SPCK, 2015)*

|               |                                |               |                                    |               |  |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>4 Sun</b>  | Matt 21.33-44                  | 15 T          | <b>St Teresa</b> Luke 11.47-end    | <b>25 Sun</b> | Matthew 22.34-40                       |
| 5 M           | Luke 10.25-37                  | 16 F          | Luke 12.1-7                        | 26 M          | Luke 13.10-17                          |
| 6 T           | Luke 10.38-end                 | 17 S          | <b>St Ignatius</b> Luke 12.8-12    | 27 T          | Luke 13.18-21                          |
| 7 W           | Luke 11.1-4                    | <b>18 Sun</b> | Matthew 22.15-21                   | 28 W          | <b>SS Simon and Jude</b> Luke 6.12-19  |
| 8 T           | Luke 11.5-13                   | 14 W          | Luke 11.42-46                      | 29 T          | Luke 13.31-end                         |
| 9 F           | Luke 11.15-26                  | 19 M          | Luke 12.13-21                      | 30 F          | Luke 14.1-6                            |
| 10 S          | Luke 11.27-28                  | 20 T          | Luke 12.35-38                      | 31 S          | Luke 14.1, 7-11                        |
| <b>11 Sun</b> | Matthew 22.1-14                | 21 W          | Luke 12.39-48                      | <b>1 Sun</b>  | <b>All Saints</b> Matthew 5.1-12a      |
| 12 M          | Luke 11.29-32                  | 22 T          | <b>St John Paul II</b> Lk 12.49-53 | 2 M           | <b>All Souls</b> John 5.19-25; 6.37-40 |
| 13 T          | <b>St Edward</b> Luke 11.37-41 | 23 F          | Luke 12.54-end                     | 3 T           | Luke 14.15-24                          |
| 14 W          | Luke 11.42-46                  | 24 S          | Luke 13.1-9                        | 4 W           | <b>S Charles B'meo</b> Luke 14.25-33   |