



**Right Reverend Patrick Joseph McKinney**

**Bishop of Nottingham**

## **Pastoral Letter for the Feast of Pentecost**

**appointed to be read at Pentecost Masses celebrated in the Diocese of Nottingham  
on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

### **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit”**

Last year, in a piece of research called ‘Talking Jesus’, 4,000 adults across the UK were asked about Christianity. Of those who were not Christians, 53% knew someone who was a practising Christian in the UK, and only 2% of them knew a Christian minister. It was overwhelmingly lay practising Christians that these people knew. Of those asked, 54% believed that Jesus was a real human person, 24% of people didn’t know how to describe Jesus, and only 16% of those interviewed believed that Jesus rose physically from the dead. So this fairly recent research shows us something of the missionary task we have as Catholics. But, even more positively, 74% of those who were not Christians felt comfortable when a Christian talked to them about their faith in Jesus, and 41% felt closer to the Christian who had humbly and sensitively shared their faith. As a result of this, 33% of the people interviewed wanted to know more about Jesus, and 36% were open to an experience of an encounter with Jesus! This research seems to indicate that there are a surprising number of people who are genuinely open to hearing more about Jesus from committed Christians; from people, just like you, who can humbly share with others your experience of knowing Jesus and his love for you, and how your relationship with Jesus shapes the way you try to live your lives. It would appear that our society is not quite so secular as some commentators would have us believe!

This suggests that the courage of the first disciples in speaking to others about Christ will need to become more and more a feature of our own lives as Christians today; the courage to speak humbly and honestly to others about the difference that knowing, loving, and serving Jesus, makes to our lives; and the courage to invite those we encounter to consider becoming Christians or, if they have drifted away from Church, to consider accepting some support to help them to get to know again, Jesus and his Church. This more invitational approach to mission will take courage on our part, because many of us do not find it easy to speak about our Christian faith, or even our prayer; many of us also struggle with our conscience about whether we should speak out

on certain topics and matters we experience at work or in our neighbourhood. Why? Because so many of us do not like to stand out from the crowd, and because we often feel a little unsure about what to say, and how best to say it.

This is why today's great Feast of Pentecost is so encouraging. It reminds us that the call of Jesus to his disciples, 'go make disciples of all nations' went hand in hand with Jesus' promise to send them the Holy Spirit. They were not to bear witness to Jesus without the help of the Spirit. We too have been given the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation to help us bear witness to Jesus. We are not asked to do this without the Spirit's help. Saint Paul reminds us in the second reading today, "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' unless they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit'. What a difference encountering the Risen Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit made to Saint Paul's life! From being Saul, the persecutor of Christians, Paul became a courageous witness to Christ and one of the Church's great missionaries. We know from his writings that his life was transformed as he came under the influence of the Holy Spirit and allowed the Spirit to shape his life in the service of God. As a result he was able to speak courageously and authentically to others of the difference that knowing Christ Jesus, and being guided by the Holy Spirit, had made to his life. Paul's passion for the Risen Christ was such that he wanted everyone, not just to know about Christ, but to personally encounter Him and to open their hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit really did transform Saint Paul's life. May that truth encourage each of us this Pentecost to seek the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit; to help us to bear witness to Christ in all the places we meet other people: in our home, our place of work, our school, university campus, and our neighbourhood. Let me end with these encouraging words of Pope Saint John Paul II:

*"The Holy Spirit is like a wind filling the sails of the great ship of the Church. If, however, we look at her closely, she uses numerous other sails that are the hearts of the baptised. Everyone, dear friends, is invited to hoist their sails, to unfurl them with courage, and to permit the Spirit to act with all his sanctifying power. By allowing the Spirit to act in one's own life, one also makes the best contribution to the mission of the Church. Do not be afraid to unfurl your sails to the breath of the Spirit!"*

Please join me in praying this Pentecost that each of us may become more open to the Holy Spirit, and so more missionary in our words and actions.

With prayer and good wishes,

+ Patrick

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