



# DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of  
The Right Reverend Terence J Brain  
Bishop of Salford*

---

Dear Family of God,

Love is the bond that makes a family: the strength of the family is in proportion to the strength of the bond of love. Each time I write to you I address you as “family of God”, those bonded in love through His first loving us. Our Holy Father Pope Benedict has recently written to all of us about the gift of God’s love in his first encyclical letter entitled ‘God is Love’. “Since God has first loved us, love is no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.” (Deus Caritas Est 1)

As we begin our Lenten exercises we should see this time as an opportunity to respond openly to the love of the Father. The readings at Mass this morning, are all speaking about building up the relationship with God. The covenant between God and ourselves is recalled in the first reading: He will be our God; we are made in his image and likeness. There is a bond between us of love; a love that shows itself in the Incarnation of the Son of God, whose life is one of loving giving of self to the Father. St. Peter, our first Holy Father, teaches us this in the extract of his letter that we listened to today. And Mark, in the Gospel, shows Christ opening himself up to the love that the Father proclaimed to him at his baptism: “my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”.

In the liturgy today we see the growth in the relationship of the Lord God with ourselves. It mirrors our own experiences growing from childhood to maturity. As a child parental love schooled us, taught us until we realised the truth that the bond of love is to be found not in our own wants, but in a loving giving of self to those we love, and yet even further to freely give of one’s life to all who are loved by God. Love is life giving, life fulfilling. Love is vital.

Penance and mortification make sense when there is love. If we don’t truly love anyone, then we will never need to say sorry: never need to build up relationships; never need to look beyond ourselves. We will never need to give anything. We can close down. But God’s expression of his love for us calls us to seek him.

“To the Lord belongs earth and all it holds,  
the world and all who live in it;  
...Who has the right to climb the mountain of the Lord,  
who the right to stand in His holy place?  
He whose hands are clean, whose heart is pure,  
Whose soul does not pay homage to worthless things  
And who never swears a lie.  
...Such are the people who seek him,  
who seek your presence, O God of Jacob.” (Ps 24)

We are called to seek his face, and one of the ways we can seek the loving face of God and become people pure in heart, is through praying in our families for a deepening of faith. School your family in the discipline of praying together. Faith is that life-giving gift to know the God who loves us. It is the gift of Faith that enables us to be loving – life giving – in every aspect of our lives. Choose life! The deeper our faith is, the stronger our love for each other but especially for God, the Father of us all. And it is this love that makes us truly human.

Later in the year, July, there will be a gathering of families in Valencia, Spain, called by the Holy Father to encourage family life to be built around the presence of the Lord. It is planned to send families from our diocese to take part and to come home renewed with the hidden life of Christ to share this gift with us. We are also taking part in the Programme called “Celebrating Family” that will focus on the gift of God’s love being welcomed into our families. So this Lent, why not, as a family, look together as to how you can seek the face of the Lord. The old adage “the family that prays together stays together” is still true today. Grow in faith: choose life; seek the face of the Lord.

+ Terence J. Brain  
Bishop of Salford

*Given on the Feast of the Chair of St Peter the Apostle  
and appointed to be read in all chapels and churches of the Diocese  
on the weekend of 5 March 2006, the First Sunday of Lent*