



PASTORAL LETTER
OF
BISHOP ALAN HOPES

To be read at all Masses over the weekend of February 25/26 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear Friends,

You cannot be the slave of God and money.

The materialistic culture of today is something that is completely opposed to life in the Kingdom of God. Where life is based on materialistic values, people are insecure and anxious. Life that is based on Gospel values, as outlined by Jesus in today's Gospel, can be filled with serenity, confidence and joy, for its foundation lies in the sure love of God who never forgets anyone. Isaiah reassures us of this in the first reading: *Does a woman ever forget her baby at the breast, he says, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you.*

However, it is so easy for us to forget this and to become anxious about all sorts of things and especially about the future. Instead, we *worry and fret* and fail to trust in God and his love for us.

Jesus tells us not to worry about the bits that make up the jigsaw of life – food, drink and clothing. The whole of life – all God's good creation – is so much greater than the bits.

Notice that Jesus does not say that food and drink and clothing are unimportant. Nor does he say that we should not plan ahead or work hard. In fact he tells us to remember the birds that have to work very hard for their food and the plants in their process of growth.

What Jesus does say is that the beauty of creation is part of God's overall loving plan. And he says: *Are you not worth more than they are?* In other words, as the children of God we are the most important part of his care.

God already knows our needs! Can we not learn to trust him completely? Can we not pray with real confidence, *Give us this day our daily bread?*

Every daily situation we find ourselves in demands our response – anxiety or trust. A member of our family takes the wrong road – do we worry ourselves to death or pray with full confidence that the Good Shepherd is always searching for the stray. Our life is shattered through illness or accident or bereavement. Anxiety only erodes our lives even further. If we respond in faith, even though it is beyond our understanding, we discover God’s loving presence and purpose in all this. In every difficult situation we find ourselves in, let us trust God that he has not forgotten us and that he cares for us deeply.

Jesus begins the Gospel with the words: *No one can be the slave of two masters - You cannot be the slave of God and money;* and he concludes with: *Set your hearts on his Kingdom first and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well.*

This message might well be the foundation for the way in which we will seek to keep Lent which begins on Wednesday. These forty days, leading to the celebration of the Paschal feast of the Lord’s Death and Resurrection, are a special time to help us to turn in trust to the Lord and to put him first in our lives:

Through regular times of prayer in which we approach the Lord in humble trust, bringing to him our lives and needs and those of the ones we should pray for;
through fasting and penance in which we seek to curb our own selfishness in order to be more generously disposed towards others and their needs;
through almsgiving, seeking to make a fundamental difference to the lives of those who have nothing of this world’s riches.

May this holy Season be a time of growth for us in the life of God’s Kingdom. May His Holy Mother, Mary, pray that we may stay close to her Son during Lent, come to know his immense love for us and so learn to trust him with complete confidence.

With all good wishes and an assurance of my prayer,

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan S. Hopes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

The Right Revd Alan S Hopes
Bishop of East Anglia