

## **To catechumens preparing for Sacramental Initiation into the Church and candidates from other ecclesial communities preparing to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church**

Dear friends,

In my first pastoral letter as Bishop of Northampton, I used an image that I would like to share with you again now. It is the early Easter picture of the disciples hiding together behind locked doors because of fear. Maybe this image of the first Christians speaks to us in an even more powerful way during these days of coronavirus lockdown. Then again, we may be telling ourselves, at least they were hiding in their locked room “together”! Being a disciples of Jesus Christ is a community experience rather than an individualistic and solitary one. God’s people have always been a pilgrim people and by his grace, you have been brought into an experience of this pilgrimage journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church is a people. Within the isolation of our homes, it is difficult for us to feel part of this people at times. There is the live-streaming of Masses from cathedrals and churches, a very poor substitute for the dynamic gift of being brought together by the Holy Spirit, in order to sing the praises of the Lord who has gathered us to celebrate the mysteries of our faith. How I, and indeed every priest, long to be able to celebrate these life-giving mysteries again with the people of God! In the meantime, we must wait in patience. During these days of the Easter Season I wanted to share this with you, that you are very much in my heart and prayer. Please do pray for the virtue of hope and fidelity to the call you have received. I know that many of you will be living lives of service, where and when you are able to help others within your family and community. These are signs of your faith in Christ Jesus and desire to belong to his Church. May our Lord bless you and continue to support you in faith, hope and love as you await the day when you are able to celebrate the sacraments with us. We will soon celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the day when Jesus fulfilled the promise that the Father and he would pour out the Holy Spirit upon this world. I encourage you to open your lives to the coming of the Spirit in these days.

✠ David J Oakley  
Bishop of Northampton

## **To candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation**

Dear young friends,

I wonder how you were feeling during your preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation? Were you excited and wondering how the gifts you are to receive from the Holy Spirit would work in your life? Were you looking forward to this celebration when you would receive the final sacrament of initiation into God's Church? And now the whole journey towards the Sacrament of Confirmation has been put on hold because of the Coronavirus lockdown! I wanted to send you a message of encouragement in these difficult days. Even though the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation has been delayed because of this crisis, please know that your new Bishop is very much looking forward to meeting with you. Try to be patient and faithful to meeting with Jesus in prayer. Ask the saint whose name you are choosing to pray for you. Pray to the Holy Spirit that you will be even more ready to receive the gifts which will be poured out on you when you are Confirmed. We will soon celebrate that Pentecost day when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon our world. And finally, please spare a prayer or two for the new Bishop! I send you these words together with my blessing for yourself and your families.

✠ David J Oakley  
Bishop of Northampton

## **To candidates for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion**

Dear boys and girls,

We have not yet met in your parish or school. I am very much looking forward to that opportunity. In the meantime, I wanted to write a few words of encouragement to you. You will have been preparing to celebrate your first Holy Communion this term. It is such wonderful moment for you and your family, and there is often a lovely party to celebrate this day when Jesus first comes to you as the Bread of Life. If we don't have food we become hungry! What we eat gives us energy for all the things we have to do in our day. When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, he gives us the spiritual energy to live as his follower in our lives. I hope and pray that this day will come for you soon when we are allowed to celebrate with you in church. May Jesus, the Bread of Life, bless you always.

✠ David J Oakley  
Bishop of Northampton