



PASTORAL LETTER FOR ADVENT AND THE YEAR OF THE WORD

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I remember playing at home with my brother when there was a knock at the door. It was some earnest people with a bible in their hands. My brother told them to go away because Catholics did not believe in the Bible! Where he got that idea from, I do not know, but we went straight back to our game of snooker.

I wonder what part the Bible plays in your life. 84% of us hear the Bible in church. Far from being something Catholics do not believe in, the Bible is the precious Word of God. It is the way God speaks to you and to me today. In the Gospel, it is Jesus speaking to us. That is why we stand for the Gospel, why we sign our foreheads, our lips and our hearts at the beginning of the Gospel, why the priest or the deacon venerates the Gospel at the end of the reading. Because Jesus' Word is alive and active, it enables us to tell others about him.

At the beginning of a new year in the life of the Church, the Church in England and Wales is launching the **Year of the Word** with the title, "**The God Who Speaks**". The official launch in our own Diocese is this coming Saturday at our Patronal Festival Mass in honour of Our Lady Immaculate. It would be great if you could join me at the Mass in Northampton Cathedral – 11 am this Saturday, 7 December.

Some parishes have already had courses for their readers of the Word and will be having a commissioning of readers next Sunday. Other parishes are hoping to do this during Lent. Also, there will be a Diocesan Scripture Festival at Thornton on 6 June 2020.

For you and for me I hope that the Year of the Word can be an Advent gift as we unwrap the Word of God and listen more attentively to God speaking to us.

Linked in with that, I also hope that we can unwrap another Advent gift in our homes, the gift of devotion. Perhaps we can put our Bible in a special place, and each day light a candle, listen to a short reading of God's holy Word, and pray together.

In the Gospel on this first Sunday of Advent, Jesus calls us to stay awake, to live our lives happily and holily in readiness for his second coming, as we prepare to celebrate his first coming this Christmas in the stable in Bethlehem.

What better way can we do that than by celebrating God's Word worthily at Mass, living God's Word in our daily lives, and sharing God's Word with family and friends and people who know nothing about Jesus.

By the way, my brother, who shooed off the people who knocked at the door, is now a much better Catholic than I am!

With Advent blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the word "Peter" in a cursive script.

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the weekend of the 30 November/1 December 2019.*