



**PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM
THE MOST REVEREND VINCENT NICHOLS
'COME AND RECEIVE HIS FORGIVENESS'
FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ

In this brief letter, I want to urge you to receive the Sacrament of Penance, or Reconciliation during these remaining days of Lent.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation – Confession – is one of our greatest gifts. In this Sacrament, God forgives our sins, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the ministry of the priest. Now is the time to receive this Sacrament.

This is an Easter Sacrament because this gift of the Holy Spirit is a first fruit of the death of Christ. Through Christ's death the Holy Spirit fills all who open their hearts and who acknowledge their need for forgiveness. This is an Easter Sacrament because it gives us new life, a new start, removing the weight of sin from our conscience and recreating us in the sight of God. Celebrating this Sacrament – going to Confession – is therefore an Easter duty, an Easter joy.

Celebrating this Sacrament is a personal meeting with Christ. In our life of faith, we often come together to meet Christ, as at Mass. But in the Sacrament of Reconciliation we meet the Lord in a precious 'one-to-one'. He meets us personally, individually.

In preparation for this Sacrament, we ask ourselves: "Lord, what has displeased you most in me? What has saddened and offended you in my life?" In response to our Confession He offers us His personal word of loving forgiveness and the gift of His Holy Spirit to cleanse us, with the fire of love, and to redirect our lives.

After every Confession we can run to the Lord, in Holy Communion or in front of the Blessed Sacrament, in a tearful reunion, with prayers of praise and thanksgiving.

Today's Gospel includes two emotional reunions. The loving father brings back both his sons, reconciling them to himself and to each other. In the weeks before Easter Sunday let us do exactly the same.

Take up this Easter Sacrament of Reconciliation, this Easter duty, and rejoice in the love of your heavenly Father.

✠ Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the Fourth Sunday of Lent
and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on the weekend of the 17/18
March 2007

