



**PASTORAL LETTER  
OF THE  
ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM  
THE MOST REVEREND VINCENT NICHOLS  
ON  
'TAKING A SUMMER HOLIDAY'**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ

As the end of July approaches I know that, for many, holidays are at hand. We are looking forward to a welcome break from routines, spending time with family and friends and, quite probably, travelling away from home.

As a youngster I enjoyed our family holiday. I remember clearly that when we arrived at our destination, my mother would immediately set off to find the Catholic Church. We went to Mass on Sunday, knowing that wherever we might be we are part of the family of the Catholic Church. And we always based our sense of direction, for our excursions and walks, on the location of the church.

Holidays are precious. They are days for relaxation and fun; for seeing new sights, admiring the beauty of our world and, hopefully, enjoying the sunshine. Holidays can help us to grow together, to share discoveries and to talk over previous trips and happy memories. Days spent without having to rush are such a pleasure.

I hope that in this pleasant space of holiday time you will rediscover God's loving presence, too. After all, God is always with us. Often we are too busy to notice. On holiday it can be different.

We can appreciate the gift of God in our sense of physical wellbeing. After all, who made the body except God! God's work is to be seen in all the beauty of creation: in mountains, streams and flowers, in sunsets and the sea. God is also at work in human ingenuity and skill: in mighty buildings and bridges and, of course, in the beauty of art. Let us not forget to thank God for such gifts.

God is at the centre of our relationships, too, prompting us to be a little more patient, a little more ready to compromise on plans for the day. As we face the tensions of holidays, as well as their pleasures, let us ask the Creative and Holy Spirit of God to bring the best out of us. Then our holiday will be a time of recreation: of re-creation, being made anew.

Speaking to a great crowd of young people in Assisi recently, Pope Benedict highlighted our desire for fun and entertainment. People can follow this desire in light-hearted ways, but sometimes also in the ways that are destructive and wrong, especially when fuelled with alcohol or drugs. Then the Pope said: "Can this way of life bring joy? The truth is that finite things can give only a faint idea of joy, but only the Infinite can fill the heart." He went on: "Centring life upon oneself is a mortal trap: we can be ourselves only if we open ourselves in love, loving God and our brothers and sisters." (17 June 2007)

Mary and Martha, the sisters of today's Gospel, sum up this same lesson. Often in our lives we are like Martha, with so much that has to be done. Yet we long to be more like Mary, in peace, quietly attentive to the Lord and to each other. I hope that your holiday time will enable you to let Mary have her day. Spend time together gently and peacefully, and don't forget to be attentive to the Lord. He is with you. Your holiday is with Him, too.

I wish you a happy holiday and may God bless you all.

✠Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Birmingham

Given at Birmingham on the Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on the weekend of 21/22 July 2007.