**WELCOME: *AD INTRA* AND *AD EXTRA***

I’d like to begin with the situation in Ukraine, which over the last three weeks, has been much in our minds and hearts. We are at one of those pivotal moments in history: war. The sovereignty of Ukraine, its life, cities, culture and people, is being crushed by an army with a greatly superior firepower. Daily on our screens we see lives shattered, homes devastated, fighting and casualties, thousands dead and millions on the move, fleeing to safety. On the heels of the COVID pandemic comes a war that demonstrates once again the flimsy foundation of the freedom and comforts we enjoy, the volatility of international relations and the fragility of life in this twenty-first century world. As Christians, as Catholics, we are driven to ask: What can we do?

Here’s what we can do. This is the holy season of Lent and Lent is our annual spiritual campaign, a time of renewal and conversion, a time to do battle against evil in ourselves and in others. It is a season when we make a renewed effort to enact the Kingdom of God and its values. The weapons we deploy are threefold: prayer, self-denial and charity. This weekend I am sending out to all our parishes and schools a Pastoral Letter in which I will be asking everyone to offer up, in union with Christ’s self-sacrifice in the Mass, our Lenten works of prayer, self-denial and charity for the peoples of Ukraine, for an end to war and for peace. I’m asking everyone to join me in a massive spiritual campaign, just as Pope Pius V did in his time, by offering up to God our Lenten works as a plea for help. Interestingly, in 1917 during World War One, when the Blessed Mother appeared in Fatima, She called on everyone to take up spiritual weapons to re-establish peace in the world. She asked everyone to pray the Rosary, but also to undertake a deep, personal renewal in faith and conversion of life.

This spiritual campaign for Ukraine is exactly part of what we mean by the word evangelisation, to spread the Good News. Evangelisation is not just about reaching out to others. It begins with *ourselves* being evangelised, and this is a life-long endeavour, a work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and our lives. Evangelisation is always two-way, like breathing-in and breathing-out. It’s *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In other words, it is about ourselves growing deeper in our faith. This involves ongoing intellectual, moral and spiritual conversion. Intellectually, it is about deepening our knowledge of the faith, the Bible and the *Catechism*. Morally, it’s about a change of life-style, living a good life, imitating Christ by serving and helping others. And spiritually, it’s about growing in holiness, in prayer in union with the Lord, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. All of this, of course, we do as members of His Body the Church. There is no such thing as a lone disciple, a lone Christian: we are all incorporated into Christ’s Body, the Church.

So evangelisation is *ad intra* but, of course, it’s also *ad extra*. It is about outreach, reaching out to others in mission and in service, that is, offering the Gospel and helping others encounter Jesus Christ within His Body the Church. I always say ‘mission AND service,’ because this mission involves justice and advocacy, charity and service of others, especially the neediest and the poorest, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. It means offering the hand of friendship and a warm welcome into our parish communities. It was wonderful last Saturday in the Cathedral to meet 30 catechumens, adults preparing for baptism this Easter, and also 70 candidates, who are preparing to be received into full communion with the Church. I know there are many other catechumens and candidates too across the parishes of the Diocese.

This evening is about Welcome. It is good this evening for church greeters, ushers, Ministers of Welcome, and for all of us, to reflect on how we greet people and welcome them. We can share our experiences and our good practice. I often think that non-Catholic Christians are much better at this than we are. I remember at College visiting a lively Baptist church where they made me feel very welcome. There were attendants in the car park helping you to park. The greeter genuinely wanted to get to know me; he even phoned me in the week to ask if I was coming next Sunday. They also offered amazing hospitality after the Service, with a barbecue brunch.

As Catholics, we are not always as sharp. We don’t always think things through. We don’t think 360 degrees around Welcome. I remember someone in my parish in Stockport who started coming to Mass. I caught her afterwards and got to know her a little. I asked her if she knew anyone in the parish, to which she said No. Had anyone spoken to her? No, except one person who said: *Sorry, would you mind not sitting there. That’s where I usually put my bag!* Another story. I was talking recently to a young woman, a practising Anglican, who said she had attended a Mass a few weeks ago. I asked her how she found it. She said she felt awkward. The greeters were friendly and there was an invitation afterwards to coffee, but in her Anglican church everyone has a book with the Order of Service in it. She felt awkward without a book with the Order of Mass; and so she did not know when to stand, sit or kneel. No-one in this Catholic church was using a book. She said, it felt like being in a club, with members who all knew exactly what to say or do.

Part of our evangelising mission is the very specific service that we must offer of ‘accompaniment.’ Accompaniment is about nurturing interpersonal relationships. This is a key topic that Pope Francis, a Jesuit, often speaks of and there is a lot in the new 2020 *Directory For Catechesis*. The Holy Father speaks of accompaniment in a number of places, but especially in *Evangelii Gaudium* 169-173. He says:
*The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into the art of accompaniment, which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (169).*
That is a profound and beautiful thought: the sacred ground of the other. He goes on:
*We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness, without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word, which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives (171).*
Accompaniment is all about an interpersonal relationship. But it is a subtle art with a lot of aspects to consider. We need to give time, be patient with others, find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow. We also need to recognise the obstacles and also the Cross. Pope Francis again:
*One who accompanies others has to realise that each person’s situation before God, and their life in grace, are mysteries which no one can fully know from without. The Gospel tells us to correct others and to help them to grow, on the basis of a recognition of the objective evil of their actions (cf. Mt 18:15), but without making judgments about their responsibility and culpability (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37). Someone good at such accompaniment does not give in to frustrations or fears. He or she invites others to let themselves be healed, to take up their mat, embrace the cross, leave all behind and go forth ever anew to proclaim the Gospel (172).*

A priest-friend of mine made me think about this recently. He told me of a young Irish man in his ‘20s who was in a sexual relationship with another man. He happened to go into a church where a beautiful High Mass was taking place and he was very moved. It started him on a journey. Later, he met a priest in another parish, who suggested he went to Confession, during which the priest told him not to worry about the relationship he was in. Something told him this was not right and a little later he approached my priest-friend. This priest spent time with him, listened to his story and met him a few times. About three months later, grace at work, he felt he needed to abandon the relationship and to make a new start, which he did in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In other words, as the Pope says, accompaniment can involve the Cross and lead through stages of conversion. It is time-consuming on the minister’s part and requires great love and commitment to the other, walking alongside them. It is, though, a very beautiful thing to do.

Accompaniment will be one of our topics this evening, so we must not get ahead of ourselves! It is an integral part of mission and evangelisation, and for those who practice it, a wonderful ministry.

I have tried to make us think in these words of the two-way nature of evangelisation, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In responding to the crisis in Ukraine, we need to undertake a spiritual campaign based on deep spiritual renewal of life. This relates particularly to one aspect of evangelisation, the *ad intra*. But we can look forward tonight also to hearing stories about the other aspect of evangelisation, the *ad extra*. ‘Welcome’ is an aspect of evangelisation *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Welcome is first about you and me welcoming Christ and His Gospel into our lives (*ad intra*). It is also about you and I sharing Christ and His Gospel with others (*ad extra*) through our openness, friendship, warmth and hospitality so that others may cross the threshold of trust.