

## A Pastoral Letter following the death of Bishop Brian Noble



My dear brothers and sisters,

I write this family letter to you following the death of my predecessor, Bishop Brian Noble, Tenth Bishop of Shrewsbury. On Sunday last, Bishop Brian was found collapsed at his home on the Wirral and subsequently admitted to Arrowe Park Hospital where he received the Sacraments. He was surrounded in those final hours of his earthly journey, by prayer, dedicated care and friendship. On that last night, I was able to assure him personally of the prayers of the whole Diocese. As he looked back on almost sixty years as a priest and almost a quarter of a century as a bishop, his last words to me were entirely of gratitude.

It has been moving in these past days, to receive letters and testimonies which speak of the place a priest and bishop holds in the lives of so many. In this, we wonderfully glimpse how Bishop Brian was and remains, in the words of our new Saint, John Henry Newman: "...a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons". In his fifteen years

as the Bishop of the Diocese and his nine years of active retirement, a countless number will today picture Bishop Brian standing at the Altar; they will recall the witness of his prayer, his preaching, his wise counsel and his gentle humour.

We admired his perseverance in the care of the Diocese during two grave and debilitating illnesses, which brought him twice to the brink of death. At those moments of his life, the prayer of Saint John Henry Newman rang true: "If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. He does nothing in vain ... He knows what he is about". This was the trust which Bishop Brian wished to share with us in many of his homilies and pastoral letters. He wrote that, "Even in the chaos which surrounds us, our Faith assures us that mysteriously God's purposes continue to be achieved". He invited us to ask ourselves, "When life is not as we would wish, am I able to submit to His will and leave things in His hands?"; for, he insisted, "...our faith is not a theory but a way of life".

We all aim to finish life's journey with the words written by Saint Paul to the young bishop, Timothy: "I have fought the good fight to the end, I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith". However, we also know our need – as the Gospel teaches – in the end to pray as the tax collector did, "God, be merciful to me a sinner".

This past week, I was asked at the Cathedral whether there is really a need to pray for a bishop in the hour of death. My questioner reasoned that if a man had been given so great a trust and so many graces, does he really need the help of our prayers? Yet, it is surely because he was given so great a trust and so many graces that a bishop needs our prayers even more! And so, we must not fail our own Bishop Brian in that final duty of love, which leads us to pray and intercede for our loved ones and for all of the faithful departed, that they may rest in peace.

In the parishes of the Diocese there will be many opportunities in the days ahead to remember and pray for him. Then, on the 5th and 6th of November we will come together at the Cathedral and at Saint Michael and All Angels, Birkenhead, for his funeral, before his

mortal remains are laid to rest with those of Bishop Gray, in Saint Winefride's Churchyard, Neston.

May the prayer of Saint John Henry Newman for a Happy Death have been fulfilled for Bishop Brian, as the artificial lights of Arrowe Park Hospital and this whole temporal scene finally faded: "My Lord and Saviour support me in the strong arms of your Sacraments ... May I receive the gift of perseverance, and die as I desire to live, in your faith, in your Church, in your service and in your love". May Bishop Brian go with all the love, the gratitude and the prayers of the whole Shrewsbury Diocese he served as bishop – and may he now rest in peace.

United with you in this, our prayer,

**+ Mark, Bishop of Shrewsbury**