



Sermon for the Mass

celebrating the 175th anniversary

of the Establishment of the Diocese of Nottingham

Cathedral Church of Saint Barnabas, Nottingham : Monday 29th September 2025
Right Reverend Patrick McKinney, Bishop of Nottingham

Today, as we look back over the 175 years since the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, one thing has particularly struck me with some force. In the 19th century, people as different as Cardinal Manning and Cardinal Newman (soon to be made a Doctor of the Church) were very conscious of their responsibility to encourage and help facilitate the full and active involvement of the laity in the social, cultural, political and scientific life of England and Wales. Manning emphasised the importance of social and political involvement, while Newman stressed the need for the laity to be involved in the cultural and scientific aspects of society. Both of them had a vision of the Catholic Church's missionary task in society that was broad and not narrow. They saw clearly the vocation and mission of the laity both in the Church, and especially in society, and it is a vision that was reflected later at the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and which has continued in subsequent documents of the Church. Like many dioceses, we are still working to make this vision a more complete reality across our diocese, one that does not focus too narrowly on the involvement of the laity within our internal diocesan structures, but which also recognises, praises and encourages their responsibilities, witness and achievements, within the professional social, cultural and political spheres in our society and wider world.

Recognising the vital role of a well-educated laity, this diocese, following the restoration of the hierarchy, prioritised education, and particularly educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged families. It built schools before it built churches. Today is a moment to acknowledge the sacrifices made and the transformative work of teachers in our schools down through these years, many of whom were religious sisters in the earlier years. Our schools, alongside our parishes, have played a crucial role in integrating new immigrant communities into our parishes as well as our society. These communities have greatly enriched our diocese and they are a visible sign of the universality of the Church. In more recent years our diocesan schools have become academies and have been gathered into three Multi-Academy Trusts in order to strengthen their Catholic life and mission, develop succession planning of Catholic leaders, build strong governance systems, and share financial resources, where needed. It is so pleasing to see among us today a representative group of students, teachers and Trust teams. We give God thanks also for the Briars, our diocesan Youth Retreat Centre, and for all who continue to work with and support our young people.

That early vision of the Church, which came more of age at Vatican II, also called us out of the darkness of our isolation in relation to other Christians; it challenged us to be more knowledgeable of and true to our own Catholic tradition, and it invited us to be respectful of, and willing to share with and learn from those who do not share that tradition. Today we rejoice in the fact that from a shaky start in the story of our diocese, in terms of how Catholics were once viewed by others, we can, by God's grace, now trace a solid and long-established ecumenical practice of friendly, respectful and good working relationships between Church Leaders and among the clergy and laity of all our Christian churches. We're certainly grateful for the prayerful presence today of Church Leaders from other Christian traditions, and kind letters from those who could not attend. It is vital that we continue to seek every opportunity to work together to bear a united witness to Christ Jesus, and to all that we do hold in common. We thank God also for the warmer relationships we have as a Church and in our diocese with people of other faiths. Next month we're celebrating the 60th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the pivotal Vatican II document on the relationship between the Catholic Church and other religions.

Building upon the early vision of Manning and Newman, Vatican II gave us a renewed vision of the Church at the service of the world, and invited us all, laity, religious and clergy, to be actively involved in that missionary work in and through the circumstances of our everyday lives. I rejoice in the pioneering and often prophetic work of religious communities working in the diocese over the last 175 years in a variety of spheres such as, contemplative prayer, education, health, care among the poor, the sick, suffering and dying, as well as working for justice that will lead to peace, to name but a few of their charisms. I also rejoice that, bit by bit, our diocese, thorough its parishes, schools, chaplaincies and organisations is seeking still more ways, guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit, to be more outward-facing and engaged in the wider community, especially in service of the disadvantaged and those most on the margins of our society. We rejoice also in the good relationships we now enjoy with our civic leaders and representatives, as evidenced by their very welcome presence among us today.

The history of our diocese suggests that it has always thought of itself as a strong community, drawing its strength and focus from Christ, especially in the gathering of people to celebrate the Eucharist, and from the often pioneering leadership of its faithful, generous, creative and committed clergy. I join with you all, and with my brother priests especially, in acknowledging and thanking God for the Bishops, priests and deacons who have generously served the people of this diocese over the last 175 years. Later in Mass we will be honouring this year's Jubilarian priests who have continued this generous tradition. We know as a diocese that we certainly face challenges these days, but we also know we must find ever-creative ways to respond to new opportunities. The response to the challenges, and the need for change that we face, can either be, to close our eyes, bury our heads and hope for the best, or we can open our eyes and hearts still more widely and, guided by the Holy Spirit, pray for the grace to follow the Lord Jesus wherever he may be leading us. Our rich history as a diocese would suggest that, if we are to be faithful to those who have walked this way in faith before us, then there surely can be only one viable response for us all to make today: Lord help us to know your will for us these days, and then give us the grace and courage we need to follow you ever more generously, Amen.

Our Lady Immaculate, pray for us

Saint Hugh of Lincoln, pray for us

Archangels, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, pray for us