



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Statement from the Presidency of the Bishops' Conference on the National Day of Reflection for COVID-19 Tuesday 23rd March 2021

We welcome the designation of Tuesday 23rd March as a National Day of Reflection to mark the anniversary of the first national lockdown with a minute's silence at midday and doorstep vigils of light at 8pm.

We ask you all to make this not only a Day of Reflection but also a Day of Prayer. In reflection we ponder on all that has taken place; in prayer we bring this to our Heavenly Father. For all who live by faith in God, reflection and prayer always go hand in hand. Prayer completes reflection. Reflection informs prayer. Prayer opens our life to its true horizon. Without prayer we live in a foreshortened world and are more easily swamped by its clamour and tragedy. Throughout this difficult year, so many have been inspired by prayer, so much effort sustained in prayer, in every place. So let us make the 23rd March truly a day of prayer.

March 2020 was the first time our churches had to be closed. It is our hope that on this day, every one of our churches will be open. We invite everyone to enter a church on this day, to reflect and pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. We know this will involve an extra effort, but this can be part of our important contribution to a significant moment in the life of our country. Indeed, we ask that you might invite a friend, neighbour or colleague to come to church with you as you make this visit.

There is so much on which to reflect and include in our prayer.

We reflect in sorrow on all those who have died, whether family members, friends or those unknown to us personally. We pray for them, asking our Father to welcome them into their heavenly home, the destiny for which God first gave us the gift of life.

We reflect with compassion on all those who have suffered during this last year, whether through illness, stress, financial disaster or family tensions. We pray for their ongoing resilience, courage and capacity to forgive.

We reflect with thanksgiving for the generosity, inventiveness, self-sacrifice and determination shown by so many in this most difficult of times. We pray for them,

thanking God for their gifts and dedication, whether they are scientists, politicians, health workers, public servants of every kind, community leaders or steadfast family members and friends who continue to show such love and compassion.

We reflect in hope that, as the pandemic is controlled and we open up our lives again, we will gather in the lessons we have learned and build our society into a better shape, more compassionate, less marked by inequalities, more responsive to needs and deprivation. We ask for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us in this endeavour, whether we are focussing on overcoming family breakdowns, economic recovery, or building political consensus.

Christian prayer is, of course, centred on Jesus Christ, the one who is “lifted up” before us “so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3.13). We pray with Jesus, in him and through him, for he is the one who carries us, and our prayers, into the embracing presence of his Father. He is our comfort in sorrow, our strength in the face of need, our rejoicing in the gifts we celebrate and our hope in the face of the weighty darkness of death.

May Tuesday 23rd March be a great day of prayer that this pandemic comes to an end and that the gift of God’s Holy Spirit will carry us all forward to a new and better life, both here and in the world to come.

+ Vincent Nichols

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
President

+ Malcolm M^cMahon OP

Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP
Vice-President