A PASTORAL LETTER
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER

For the First Sunday of Advent 2026

APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 28th / 29th November 2026

My dear people,

let us begin by recognizing that Advent is a beautiful, God-given season. It has the twofold purpose of awakening us to the immanent celebration of our Saviour's Nativity, and to His Second Coming at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. May He find us awake, ready to welcome Him.

I speak to each of you now, at this moment in your busy, often complex lives, recognizing that you are people of Faith. I recognize those of you who have been Catholics since your earliest days. Others of you are relatively new to the Catholic Faith, trying to learn the ways of a faithful pilgrim, perhaps not always finding it easy! Some may be struggling with self-doubt, frustration or disappointment, or a sense of being let down by the behavior of Catholics – including Bishops! - who should know better. Others are blessed with the gift of a strong and joyful Faith, able to resist the distractions, the side-shows of the world and the failings of your companion pilgrims. You are truly blest and have come to know Jesus who declares Himself as The Way. There will be others listening who are not Catholic or Christian but have an attraction to Faith.

This is a beautiful Season of Grace, given to you through the Church as a gift of all that God has. Hear that again; He has given you everything He has. He has created a place deep within you, a place we call your soul, designed to keep His gift safe. It can be neglected or forgotten, but it cannot be taken from you. It remains there. Hear Jesus say to you, '***Make your home in me as I make my home in you***'. That is exactly what this season is preparing us to celebrate, just as the unborn Jesus found his first home within Mary's soul. Let us celebrate this with profound joy and gratitude.

Today and every day Jesus speaks to us and says ***'Stay awake! Keep awake!'.*** He speaks to our lives of Faith. None of us can function without physical and mental rest and sleep. Whoever struggles with sleep knows that well. Jesus knows it too. On one occasion He was so exhausted that He fell asleep in a boat during a raging storm. On another occasion He admonished His disciples who had given in to sleep at the very hour He needed them to keep awake with Him in Gethsemane. Today, at the start of Advent, He addresses each of us, speaking to our inner, spiritual life, ***'Wake up!'***

Wake up to what the Lord has already achieved for you. Wake up to the fact that your prayer has been heard and answered. God has intervened in your life. See what He has done, how He has achieved it through the personal Faith of a young woman who responded in humility, courage and trust. Become aware of how Mary's Faith has done you good. Know that the Lord was motivated to do this only by His love for you. His whole purpose was to put Himself within reach of sinners. He will not let sin win. Understand what He now asks of you if you are to follow Mary's example and be counted as one of His faithful disciples. Live your Faith for the good of others.

A book has just been published as the fruit of our recent Diocesan Centenary. '***Celebrating the History of Lancaster Diocese 2025***' will be available within the next two weeks and tells the story of the Faith we celebrate in our parishes and schools. I commend it to you as a way to deepen your appreciation of how Faith has come to us down the centuries through the lives of some outstanding figures and also through so many who quietly got on with living their Faith almost invisibly. Most of their names and faces are hidden from us by the passing years, but such people are not invisible to God. This book would be a particularly useful gift for anyone new to the Diocese as well as for those who have become Catholic in their adult years. (Dare I suggest it as a Christmas gift to help rekindle Faith in those who have drifted away?) I am grateful to the late Professor Michael Mullett and his team of collaborators for producing an illustrated narrative that helps us wake up to God's active presence in our history and our lives today. Information concerning its availability will be shared soon.

May Mary who carried Jesus in her soul and her womb be close to us at this time, that we may know Jesus who is within us. May Mary be particularly close to all women who are carrying unborn children. May Mary be close to all parents who know the tragedy of losing a child. May Mary teach us the lessons of humility, courage and trust in a loving, merciful Saviour.

With my blessing for each of you and for your families,



Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster