

Bishop's Appeal to Pray for the Pope And Bishops

The Bishop responsible for Evangelisation and Catechesis in England and Wales is appealing to the Catholic Community to pray especially for the Pope and all the Bishops as an expression of the legacy of the Papal Visit to the UK .

In a text that has been prepared for the Feast of the Chair of St Peter, Apostle (22 February), Bishop Kieran Conry, who is Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, writes:

‘This feast celebrates how the See of St Peter is a symbol of the unity of the Church founded on the Apostle Saint Peter. Peter was given a unique mission as teacher and pastor which is continued in an unbroken line to the present Pope. We are also invited to pray for our Pope and for our Bishops who teach with the authority of Christ.’

‘Nearly six months ago His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, visited the UK for four days on the first ever state visit of a Pope... In prayer we give thanks to God for those joy-filled days of grace. Today, now or later on, you are invited pause for a moment to bring to mind your memories.’

‘Blessed John Henry Newman wrote of this teaching authority, also called the Magisterium: ‘I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please,—still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.’ (*Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, 1875) Today’s Feast does not mean that we are being invited to celebrate and encourage a blind and unquestioning following of teaching imposed by others: This is a misunderstanding of the role of the Pope and Bishops. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that: ‘Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.”’ (1782)

However, we also have a duty to develop a well-informed conscience. The Catechism reads: ‘Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened,’ (1783) and the Magisterium is a gift to each one of us as instituted by Jesus Christ. He conferred on St Peter and the other Apostles the authority to teach and interpret the truth of Faith. So too do his successors, the Popes and Bishops. They judge authoritatively what is in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what is not.’

He added:

‘Another key truth that today’s Feast invites us to reflect upon is the Church’s call to witness to our faith, to evangelise. In today’s Gospel, St Peter proclaims on the Sea of Tiberias , “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”’ (Matthew 16:13-19) ... Whilst Peter and his successors lead the Church, we are reminded that every follower of Jesus Christ receives the call to proclaim confidently God’s unconditional love and mercy in their lives and in the lives of others.’

To support Catholics to evangelise a free leaflet is provided by the Bishops’ Conference Home Mission Desk called *Everyday Evangelising*. It can be downloaded from the Home Mission page of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference website:

<http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Home-Mission> The leaflet offers simple ideas about how to proclaim your faith in your daily life whether at home, work or play.