

Diocesan Centre
Coursington Road
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Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of Motherwell

4th September 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In recent days, people have been recalling the Pilgrimage of the Relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux to Scotland in September last year, highlighting, in particular, the days of the joyful weekend the relics were present here in the Diocese of Motherwell at St Francis' Xavier's Carfin. Later this month, on September 16th, the Feast of St Ninian, it will be the 10th anniversary of the Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Scotland, and once again we will be looking at the recorded film and reports of that happy occasion.

One striking thing from both these events are the crowds which gathered to greet both Our Holy Father and the Relics of St Thérèse, and the contrast with the present when we are restricted to 50 people when we gather to worship. It does feel alien to our Catholic tradition of gathering in crowds and there is a sense of frustration that this is our lot in the present emergency situation.

St Thérèse may help us, though, to come to terms with where and how we are at present. She is the saint who presented the "Way of Littlelessness" – our own spiritual sense of being little in God's loving hands; our personal littleness, yet still having our unique place in the Body of Christ, the Church; and the response we offer to the Lord in doing all the little things as best we can in loving service of him and our neighbour. Perhaps, in comparison to last September or 10 years ago, we are "little" but we are still here and we need the inspiration of St Thérèse, the Little Flower, to be alive and active as the Church today. Let us trust fully in God's providence and the graces he continues to shower into our lives, St Thérèse's roses from heaven, in order to live our faith joyfully, accepting the Cross of the present, and ready to be "Love in the Heart of the Church", as St Thérèse so beautifully described her own vocation.

All of us have been gifted by God with a beautiful vocation of being alive in this world, and being born again in baptism, and hearing the Lord's call to follow him in every moment and every choice we make throughout our lives. In September each year we have *Vocations Awareness Week* here in the Church in Scotland and, as the title suggests, we reflect on our own vocation, thanking God for all that we have received, and encouraging our young people to be attentive to the Lord's call to them and how they might respond, following the wonderful example of our saints through the ages. Here in Motherwell Diocese we have recently set up an *Office for Youth and Vocation*, the intention being to keep vocation at the heart of our engagement with, and outreach to, our young people in our parishes, schools, youth groups and associations. Fr Colin Hughes will lead this Office and will work with school chaplains and the Diocesan Education Service, with Fr Mark O'Donnell as Diocesan Youth Chaplain and the Diocesan Youth Service, and with Fr Charles O'Farrell, the Diocesan Vocations Director. Pope Francis has encouraged us to emphasise the Lord's call to each of us in our vocation and to aspire to be holy in responding fully in all that we do. It seems good therefore to bring the various strands of ministry with young people together under "Vocation".

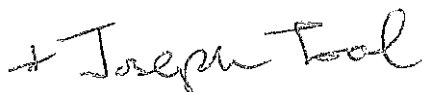
We do like to promote the particular vocation to a “consecrated life”, including in this the priesthood and religious life. With regard to Priesthood, the Diocese of Motherwell has been blessed with the ordination of 13 priests over the last ten years, i.e. since the Visit of Pope Benedict. All of these men are in parishes, as well as covering chaplaincies, and nine now have full responsibility for their parishes. At the moment the Diocese has five seminarians and four others have indicated a desire to train for the priesthood. I ask your prayers for all of them, and your financial support would be much appreciated through the special collection running through the month of September. If those in formation come to be ordained and are joined by a few more, we could hope to have a similar number of ordinations in this decade as in the one just past.

St Thérèse prayed intensely for priests as a Carmelite Sister, and indeed corresponded with some seminarians and encouraged them to persevere in their vocation, so it is good to seek her intercession and inspiration for those preparing for priesthood at present. Once we get beyond the present crisis, the reality we will face in our parishes, and which will be the future for those most recently ordained and those in formation, may be quite different from what we have been used to. St Thérèse’s spirituality of “*Littleness*” may well be quite apt for parishes reduced in numbers and resources. Being a priest looks certain to be challenging in new ways and those responding to the Lord’s call will need St Thérèse’s inspiration to trust in the Lord’s providence as his “little ones” and to accept the pain of the cross. Our memory, therefore, of the Pilgrimage of her Relics is not to be sentimental but rather an encouragement and inspiration for us all, led by our priests, young and old, to face the difficult times ahead and to continue to live and honour our faith in the fullest way possible.

May the Lord bless all our efforts and keep joyful in our Christian Vocations.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "+ Joseph Toal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+ Joseph Toal