

*Bishop Christopher's Pastoral Letter for 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – 4
September 2011*

In his Pastoral Letter, Bishop Christopher reflects on two things that are happening in September 2011, which will affect some features of the way we try to live our Christian lives - the re-translation of the Roman Missal for use at Mass, and the return to abstinence from meat as our common Friday penitence."

Right Reverend Christopher Budd
Bishop of Plymouth



PASTORAL LETTER

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

4 September 2011

Dear friends in Christ,

This month two things are happening which will affect some features of the way we try to live our Christian lives: we are changing the language we use at Mass, and we return to abstinence from meat as our common Friday penitence.

I would like to share a reflection or two with you about these matters.

The retranslation of the Roman Missal has given us a kind of English that is somewhat different from our everyday language, but is nearer to the original Latin text and puts us in touch with the scriptural roots of many prayers at Mass. This latter has to be a gain! However, as you all know, there has been much discussion and controversy about this translation and we have to face the fact that it will not please everyone.

May I ask you to give it a hearing! The most important community action we share is the Mass. It stands for everything that Christ is and we are called to be. A new language is an opportunity for us to appreciate anew the prayer and action of the Mass. As we use new words, we can more consciously and deliberately think of what we say and ponder the meaning of our involvement in the sacrifice Christ has given to his Church as a permanent memorial of our redemption. We will grow accustomed to the new words and they will become a part of us, just as the previous ones did. To have this opportunity to renew our understanding of what we pray and do is indeed a moment of grace.

Today [4 September 2011] we start to use the Ordinary of the Mass and on the first Sunday of Advent we will move to use the complete Missal. I ask you

to embrace the new words as wholeheartedly as possible. We will become accustomed to this new translation and in time it will acquire its own dignity.

The other matter, our weekly act of penance on Friday, may seem a step back in time. Well it is! However, we return to an old practice, hopefully with a renewed understanding of what we do and why. From early times there has been a discipline of marking Friday (the day of the Lord's death) with penitence. The only change a few years back was that it was left to the individual to choose what this penitence should be. Many continued to abstain from meat, others chose something different and I suspect not a few of us forgot that Friday meant penitence.

The Bishops' decision to reintroduce abstinence from meat was driven by many considerations. Not least among them was an awareness that we all need to reawaken in ourselves sorrow for sin, and to become more alert to our need for forgiveness and healing. It also seemed timely that we should do something together; in other words to recapture the corporate nature of our repentance from sin. The advantage of corporate abstinence from meat (or equivalent) is that it is easily linked to almsgiving and has an important relationship with prayer.

The Christian commitment to prayer is daily. Friday abstinence links repentance for sin to prayer. As we know, prayer itself will always have an element of acknowledgement of sin and repentance because that is our reality. Some tangible act of corporate repentance is an effective way of building this into the rhythm of the Christian life. From the middle of September, then, we will express our repentance for sin together through abstaining from meat on Fridays.

May I suggest that with new words at Mass and a renewed commitment to Friday abstinence we have a good opportunity to engage once again with two important features of the Christian life - prayer and worship and prayer and penance. These may also lead us to reconsider the place of the sacrament of reconciliation in our lives.

I offer every good wish and blessing to you all as we continue on our journey of faith.

✠ **Christopher**

Bishop of Plymouth

To be read at all Masses on the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time