



The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – May 2009

Charabancs and Pilgrimages

A S SUMMER comes into view, trips of various kinds become a very attractive idea. We have plenty on offer: the Walsingham National Pilgrimage (25th May), the Ebbsfleet Children and Young People's Eucharistic Day at Brean Sands (6th June), the Glastonbury Pilgrimage (20th June) and the Walsingham Youth Pilgrimage ('Pass the Word', 3rd-7th August). Slightly less splashy as outings but important occasions nevertheless are the two Easter Stational Masses (29th April at Nuneaton and 20th May at Weymouth) and the two Ordinations (24th June at Friar Park and 11th June at St Luke, Kingstanding). It would be good to know that every one of you was at one or other of the pilgrimages, one or other of the Stational masses and one or other of the ordinations.

It would be a waste of a Pastoral Letter simply to advertise events and try to drum up support (and I haven't put the times in!) Instead I want to give you some reasons why these events are a necessary part of our life together. First, thinking about the Pilgrimages: a pilgrimage – taking the trouble to go from A to B for the sake of the Lord – is an acting out of our life on earth. Life itself is a pilgrimage from birth to death and pilgrimages are an acting out of that life in miniature and a chance to do some real thinking about how to make spiritual progress as we get older. Second, coming together for the Easter Stational masses. Here too there is a journey: from the little pool in which we swim around – our parish community – into a bigger pool, where we find a whole churchful of Easter People from here there and everywhere, and welcome into our fellowship the newly-baptised and newly-confirmed. Third, supporting the Ordinations. We shall be creating three new priests, two stipendiary and one non-stipendiary. We need many more but these three will be very welcome. So, making the journey, being part of the larger group, the bigger picture, and welcoming the ministry of new Christians and the ministry of new priests: three very good reasons for going on charabancs and pilgrimages.

It's no accident that the word 'holidays' comes from the phrase 'holy days'. As you read this, you might be planning a summer holiday – whether it's the sun lounger in the garden (well, we can but hope for good weather...) or a flight to Costa Cheapo. It would be good too to see these essential breaks in our routine as chances to rehearse the journey of life, see the bigger picture and find friendship and renewal through the company of others. Viewed like this, even our private plans which apparently have nothing to do with God or the Church, are part of the offering of our life and the hallowing of time.

May God bless you as you journey on towards eternal life with him.

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