

# Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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## From the Bishop

Passiontide 2020

To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of the United Kingdom,

Since at least Anglo-Saxon times England has been referred to as the “Dowry of Mary”. We often think of dowries as being settlements on a bride which she brings with her into marriage. However, it has another meaning, and it is from this meaning England has this title.

You may be aware that many grand old English Country Estates - think of “Downton Abbey” type Houses! - often have a smaller, although sometimes still impressive, house, such as the one the dowager Countess of Grantham (played by the indomitable Dame Maggie Smith), lived in Downton Abbey. Known as the “Dower House”, this was a property provided for a widow (the dowager) from the estate of her late husband - it was a place where she could live and maintain herself, but it would often require considerable care and attention perhaps a complete renovation before it was a fit dwelling place.

England’s Patron Saint has long been St George, but it was not always so. The ninth century St Edmund the Martyr, was St George’s predecessor. But above them all is set Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, as Patroness of England. There were, and possibly still are, more Churches dedicated to Our Lady in England than any other Saint. Prior to the Reformation you could hardly move for Shrines dedicated to her.

In 1381 England was ravaged by the Peasants’ Revolt, when the imposition of a poll tax caused the south-eastern counties to rise in open rebellion. This revolt was suppressed but it was a struggle. After regaining control of England King Richard II consecrated England to Our Lady in thanksgiving for the victory.

Later there was issued at Lambeth a decree, on 10th February 1399, which read: “The contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation has brought all Christian nations to venerate her from whom came the beginnings of redemption. But we, as the humble servants of her inheritance, and liegemen of her especial dower - as we are approved by common parlance ought to excel all others in the favour of our praises and devotions to her.”

This year, on the Feast of the Annunciation, 25<sup>th</sup> March, there was to have been a re-consecration of England to Our Lady by the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, in Norfolk. Sadly, with our

country in lockdown, this big event was not able to take place.

With the Covid-19 virus and the threat it poses, causing the Prime Minister to declare an emergency -not to mention the general moral and spiritual decline we have seen in our nation, in recent decades, England, Mary's Dowry, and the whole of the United Kingdom, most definitely has need of God's mercy and Mary's prayers. Also, like the Dower Houses I mention above, our Country, will require considerable care if not a complete renovation before it will become a worthy place for of Our Lady to call home.

Since the Council of Ephesus in 431 Mary has been called 'Theotokos', meaning God-bearer or Mother of God. For we know Christ cannot be truly man as well as truly God unless he is born of a human mother.

We recall the Angel's salutation of Mary at the Annunciation and the revelation of the unique role she was to play in her own, and our, salvation. Mary, as the Mother of Jesus, also HAS to be Mother of God. To deny this is to deny Jesus' divinity.

As the Creed we recite and affirm regularly proclaims:

*Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father;*

Scripture directs us to Galatians 4:4,"when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" , and to John 's Gospel where Mary is always called 'the Mother of Jesus' and in 20:31 we find the words ' Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name'.

In a fragment of papyrus preserved in the Rylands Library, Manchester, dated no later than 270 A.D., there is the earliest recorded prayer to Mary in Greek, which translated reads: 'we fly to thy (her) patronage'.

This clearly illustrates how from the earliest times the Church saw the Blessed Virgin Mary's maternal role for followers of her Son, for us ... and so it follows for England, her dowry.

And Oh, how we need a Mother's love and prayers today!

The challenges of this present crisis requires all of us to respond with fortitude and faith ... and not a little creativity. We find ourselves, I hope, trying wherever possible to maintain some form of Christian practice and worship in the face of much which is familiar being temporarily taken away through the closure, albeit necessary, of our church buildings.

I have always resisted the broadcasting of services online - except for big special events. Certainly not my Sunday services. However, I decided the time had come, from my own lock down, that I should try to provide what I hope is a helpful contribution to salve these feelings of frustration. I am pleased that other clergy are

also doing similar things and thank them for their pastoral efforts.

Quite understandably this has prompted some people to ask about the effectiveness of watching worship on television, computers or smart devices. Of whether there is a difference between live streaming or recorded worship.

My own feeling is that, although of course gathering together and engaging in worship with others physically, and enjoying fellowship with other Christians is an essential part of our life and witness as Christians, I think it highly likely that the Lord of Time and Space, who is not constrained by our calendar or our feet of clay, can share His Grace in any way He chooses including with those watching and participating in faith regardless.

I will, Dv, be uploading services from my Domestic Chapel of St Nicholas, at my home in Lydd, with a Low Mass on Palm Sunday, the Diocesan Chrism Mass (at which I will perform the annual blessing of the Holy Oils) on the Wednesday of Holy Week and Mass on Maundy Thursday evening. On Good Friday I hope to celebrate the Liturgy of the Day and will also try to upload a meditation on the Stations of the Cross. These will appear on the Diocesan Facebook Page ( @ACCDUK), my own YouTube Channel (search "BishopMead") and be linked on the Diocesan website ([www.anglican catholic.org.uk](http://www.anglican catholic.org.uk)). I will not be attempting the Holy Saturday Vigil on my own, but I will bless a new Paschal Candle for the Pro-Cathedral on Easter Day and celebrate a Sung Mass - Pontifically!

My prayer for you all is to remain safe and well during this present crisis. To keep smiling in adversity and to put you trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I would like to end with the Prayer from the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

O Mary, recall the solemn moment  
when Jesus, your divine Son,  
dying on the cross  
confided us to your maternal care.  
You are our Mother;  
we desire ever to remain your devout children.  
Let us therefore feel the effects  
of your powerful intercession with Jesus Christ.

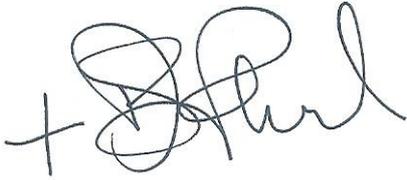
Make your name again glorious in this place,  
once renowned throughout our land  
by your visits, favours and many miracles.

Pray, O Holy Mother of God,  
for the conversion of England,  
restoration of the sick,  
consolation for the afflicted,  
repentance of sinners,  
peace to the departed.

O Blessed Mary, Mother of God,  
Our Lady of Walsingham,

intercede for us. Amen

In Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Mead', with a cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

The Right Reverend Damien Mead  
Bishop Ordinary