



A Pastoral Letter
On the Catholic Faith we have received
To be read at all Masses on Sunday 23rd February 2025

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Gospel speaks to us today of God's overflowing generosity, a generosity we discover anew each Sunday, and indeed every day, in the Holy Eucharist where Christ gives Himself wholly and entirely for usⁱ. We are called to imitate this Divine, Eucharistic generosity in each of our lives and in every vocation. This leads me to reflect today on the gift of faith which we have received in all its fulness in the Church.

I write to you from the Cathedral where even the beauty of wood, glass and stone stand in silent testimony to the faith of all those who have shared the journey of our Shrewsbury Diocese. The Cathedral has become a place of pilgrimage in this Holy Year and my letter today is accompanied by a YouTube video that invites you to join me in a virtual pilgrimage to our Cathedral. This video can be found on the Shrewsbury Diocese websiteⁱⁱ.

Yesterday, I met in Chester many adults who will be Baptised and received into the Church at Easter. The first question that will be put to them is: "*What do you ask of the Church?*" Their answer will be a single word: "*Faith.*" The Catechism reminds us, that we receive the gift of faith through the Church, since the Church believes first; and she nourishes and sustains our faith through life's journeyⁱⁱⁱ. For we can no more give ourselves this gift of faith than we can give ourselves the gift of life. This vital task of handing on the faith led the first Apostles to describe the Church as "*the pillar and bulwark of the truth*" guarding "*the faith once delivered to the saints*"^{iv}.

The faith we ask to share in Baptism was put into the words of the 'Apostles Creed.' These words used at Baptism from earliest centuries profess the faith received from the Apostles beginning with the Latin word 'Credo' meaning "I believe." Today, some of our contemporaries speak disparagingly of what they call 'organised religion.' They suggest a "disorganised religion" is more authentic though it would amount to little more than opinions drawn from ever-changing views around us. Such an answer to the great questions of life can never be a secure foundation. And so, the Creed sets out the unchanging faith received by the Church in all truth, providing the sure foundation on which our lives can be built in faith, hope and love.

When the bishops of the world first gathered in the City of Nicaea in 325 AD after centuries of persecution, they made the great profession of the Catholic faith which we call the ‘Nicene Creed.’ Gathered in ecumenical council they declared the faith which the Church had received from the beginning and had everywhere believed. It is a moving thought that when you and I declare “*I believe*” at Mass, we are repeating those same words. The need for such a profession of faith was occasioned by the error of one priest, Arius, who taught that while Jesus was the highest and most exalted, he was less than God. This dark error occasioned a luminous profession of the Church’s faith, that has echoed through the centuries. For with all the Church we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ who is “*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father;*” and “*through him all things were made.*” Pope Francis, who we are accompanying with our prayer in his time of illness, has asked in this Holy Year of 2025 that we especially celebrate the anniversary of the Creed first professed at Nicaea in AD 325^v.

Fifteen years ago, I became a bishop for you. At the heart of this mission, like every bishop before me, was handing on the faith of the Church. I promised I would always “*Guard the deposit of faith pure and entire according to the tradition preserved always and everywhere in the Church from the time of the Apostles*”^{vi}. By Baptism and Confirmation, we all share in this apostolic task by imitating God’s overflowing generosity in our readiness to share and defend the Catholic faith in all its fullness^{vii}. In our Cathedral church, we remember the courage and generosity of the founding generation of this Diocese, who in the face of every difficulty and contradiction, handed down the faith to us. Let us ask Our Lady’s help in this sacred trust of handing on the faith we have received to all generations to come.

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Lk. 6: 27-38 & Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1374

ⁱⁱ <https://www.dioceseofshrewsbury.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church No 168

^{iv} Cf. I Tim. 3: 15, Jude 3

^v The Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee 2025

^{vi} The Roman Pontifical for the Ordination of Bishops

^{vii} Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church Nos. 863 & 1303