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A Pastoral Note

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, I wanted, as your shepherd, to take time out to write to you.

We are living in unprecedented times, and already we are in our fifth week of lockdown. It has been, and continues to be, a very difficult time, a way of the cross. We have been deprived of so many things we take as given: of the opportunity to gather with others for prayer and worship and to celebrate the sacraments; of signs of affection; of extended family; of sharing a meal with friends; the freedom to move around at will. Yet all these are somehow rather minor, as some of us are suffering the pain of loss of a friend or family member.

Yet our experience of these last weeks has not been entirely negative. We have witnessed the selfless heroism of the NHS front-liners and care staff in our Care Homes, of key workers in other services, families and neighbours committed to keeping one another safe, the millions of people up and down the country who continue to self-isolate for the sake of the Common Good. And who could not fail to be inspired by the endeavours of Captain Tom?

The Government and their Scientific Advisors think that we are at a critical stage in our fight with Covid-19 and although we are still in lockdown - and will be for a while longer – their thoughts are now turning towards the future.

Our attention in the Diocese has also turned to life after lockdown. Our conversations have been aimed at putting us in the best place for when restrictions are lifted. However, all that can be said at present is that the process will be gradual. We must not expect it to be an easy transition “getting back to normal”. We must remember that this journey will demand of us still more patience and generosity of spirit. But equally remember, that we can do all things in Him “whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” Eph3:20

At the darkest moments of the crisis in Italy, Pope Francis shared these words of encouragement with the people of Italy and I share them with you at this critical moment of our own journey.

Tonight, before falling sleep, think about when we return to the street, when we will hug again, when all the shopping together will seem like a party. Let us think about when the coffees return to the bar the small talk, the photos close to each other. We think about when it will be a memory but normality will seem an unexpected and

beautiful gift. We will love everything that has so far seemed futile to us. Every second will be precious. Swims at the sea, the sun until late, sunsets, toasts, laughter. We will go back to laughing together.

Strength and courage. See you soon. Pope Francis.

So, when we began our time in lockdown I encouraged you to do three things and I want to ask you to continue to do the same:

Keep safe: Follow the government guidelines, for the protection of all people lives.

Keep close to the Lord: Continue to pray often when and wherever you can with the help of all the resources available.

Keep in touch: Use every means available to you to stay in contact with as many people as you can.

Yours in the Redeemer

+ *Ralph Heskett C.S.R.*

Bishop of Hallam