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Lent Pastoral Letter 2026

Archbishop Shane Mackinlay

There have been significant changes for us in the Archdiocese of Brisbane over the last year. Shortly after Easter last year, Pope Leo XIV succeeded Pope Francis, and then in September I took up my new ministry as Archbishop of Brisbane. Last week, Pope Leo issued his first Message for Lent, in which he reflects on three themes: listening, fasting and our shared journey together. I was particularly struck by the first of these themes, as I feel like much of my focus over these early days as Archbishop has been on listening. I need to learn about the people of the Archdiocese, its parishes and communities, its schools, hospitals and aged care, its organisations and agencies. I need to hear about the joys and sorrows that people carry, as well as the hopes and fears that are part of looking to the future.

Pope Leo points out that listening is not just something we do when we enter a new situation. Rather, it is a critical ongoing part of healthy relationships with one another and with God. Lent is a time when we seek to open ourselves to conversion: acknowledging our failures and mistakes, so that we can turn again to God and renew our relationships with those around us. The journey of conversion always begins with listening. As Pope Leo says: 'Every path towards conversion begins by allowing the Word of God to touch our hearts.' That can only happen if we make space, stepping back from the noise around us, and from all that we want to say and convince others about, so that there is space to hear and to listen.

Making space for listening is an act of humility and generosity. It shows a deep commitment to the other. In Pope Leo's words, 'the willingness to listen is the first way we demonstrate our desire to enter into relationship with someone.' We know what a precious gift that is from our own experiences of another person really listening to us.

Pope Leo proposes that the best model we have for listening is God's relationship with his people. Again and again, God's first response in the scriptures is to assure us: 'I have heard my people's cry.' And Jesus' own ministry is shaped by listening to

MOST REVEREND SHANE MACKINLAY
Archbishop of Brisbane



the needs and hopes of those he encounters. So, as Pope Leo says, 'we must allow God to teach us to listen *as he does*'.

In our own context, listening has been the starting point for our synodal journey, both in our contribution to the Synod for a Synodal Church and in our own celebration of the Archdiocese's Synod 24. We have experienced that a dialogue built on listening allows us to discern together where God is calling us. That experience allows us to recognise the importance of Pope Leo's observation that 'conversion refers not only to one's conscience, but to the quality of our relationships and dialogue.'

More broadly in our Australian community, listening with care, compassion and openness is desperately needed as we seek to respond to the division, shock and grief that we are carrying after the appalling attack at Bondi last December.

As we enter this Season of Lent, most of our parishes will be commencing the final stage of preparation for baptism of those who wish to become Christian and for reception of Christians baptised in other Churches who seek to enter full communion with the Catholic Church. It is a privilege to accompany these elect and candidates on their path to Easter, as they offer us a model of listening to God's Word in a way that has led them on a journey of conversion, discipleship and renewal. Let us pray for them and be inspired by them throughout this Season of Lent, as we all seek to be renewed in listening and responding to one another and to the Word of God.

Yours sincerely,

MOST REV. SHANE MACKINLAY
ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE