

Christus Resurgens
(Resurrexi) EASTER PREFACE

Around Eastertime, understandably enough, many bishops make it a point to address a pastoral letter to their people. As a form of communication, I suppose pastoral letters have got a rather bad image — for many people (and on the whole perhaps unfairly) they conjure up ideas of denunciations and condemnations, rather than an attempt by a bishop to share his thoughts on some aspect of Christian living with his people. No doubt some bishops have, at some times, been negative and denunciatory. Yet, some of the most moving literature of Christianity that survives right from early days is in the form of bishops' letters to their people, what we call now 'pastoral letters'. The pattern comes from the so-called 'pastoral letters' of St Paul, writing to churches, Christian communities, which he knew personally, with encouragement, advice, inspiration and instruction. But even St Paul, at times, evidently found it necessary to lay down the line and be demanding in his instruction and practical advice. | And so, to today's topic. There's been a lot of talking and writing these recent years about the Church, and what models best express its meaning and function today. In Asia, as elsewhere, they're talking about 'Basic Christian communities', and here in H.K. our bishop too, in his Easter message, has given his backing and encouragement to the formation and building up of such small communities of Christians in and alongside of the existing parish structures of the Church. Another model of the Church is that of the family: and this was the theme of an Easter pastoral letter of the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume, this year. It's part of this

that I wanted to share with you today, for reflection and prayer. So, Cardinal Hume: "If someone were to stop you in the street and put this question to you: 'What is the Church?', how would you set about answering it? Would your first thought be of all the parish churches dotted all over the country? Or would you first think of the Church as made up of bishops, priests and religious? Sometimes people talk about a person with a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life as "going into the Church". None of these answers would be correct. When I speak of the Church, I am thinking of all those who have been baptized. I think of all the baptized as forming one community, and that community is a family — God's family. Within that community or family, each has a special call, or vocation, from God. Some are called to be priests or religious; others are called to be doctors or teachers or lawyers; others again to work in a factory or office, in a pub or in a bank, and so on. There are as many 'vocations' as there are jobs to be done in the world. And I do not forget the vocation to be a retired person or a sick and handicapped one: nor do I forget the rather special anxiety of those who are unemployed. There are, too, special states of life. God calls some to be married men and women, fathers & mothers: others are called by God to remain single. But the one thing which makes us all members of the Christian community is Baptism. It is baptism which makes us in a special way the sons & daughters of God. It is baptism which makes us brothers and sisters of Christ. It is at baptism that we first receive the Holy Spirit to guide and help us in our Christian life .." | Before continuing with Cardinal Hume, some music now, for Eastertime: "Haec Dies" by William Byrd

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MUSIC - PRAYERS
(cont. TABLET 8.4.78 p34)