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**Rt Rev. Joseph Toal** STB KC\*HS  
**Bishop of Motherwell**

11<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wish you every blessing on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, especially to all who are sick in any way – may the Lord be close to you and touch you with his healing mercy. This day is the Church's 30<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick, and Pope Francis' reflection focuses on Jesus' words – *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"* (Lk 6:36). The final section of the message is headed *Pastoral Mercy: presence and proximity*, and says the following:

*"If the worst discrimination suffered by the poor – including the sick, who are poor in health - is the lack of spiritual attention, we cannot fail to offer them God's closeness, his blessing and his word, as well as the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturing in faith. In this regard I would like to remind everyone that closeness to the sick and their pastoral care is not only the task of specially designated ministers: visiting the sick is an invitation that Christ addresses to all his disciples. How many sick and elderly people are living at home and are waiting for a visit? The ministry of consolation is the task of every baptised person, mindful of the words of Jesus "I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25:36).*

As we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady's Apparitions at Lourdes, with the Holy Father we seek her intercession for all the sick and their families, and for all healthcare workers, who offer God's mercy and closeness to all they care for.

In 2022 we are celebrating the Centenary of our own Shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes at Carfin Grotto. To mark this important anniversary the Scottish Bishops have confirmed that the Grotto be designated as Scotland's National Shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes, and wish to encourage the faithful from across the country and beyond to make personal, family, and parish pilgrimages to the Grotto. As we move through the time of trial and restrictions due to the Covid pandemic, the Grotto offers a tranquil, spiritual space for both personal and communal prayer and celebration of our Catholic Faith. With fewer opportunities for organised pilgrimages to other shrines, a visit to Carfin offers a special opportunity to spend time with Our Lady and to pray for all who are suffering and in special need.

In recent times it has been made known that a pilgrimage of the Relics of St Bernadette to the UK is being organised this autumn, and the Scottish week of the visit will be held at Carfin, culminating with Mass on Saturday 1 October, the Feast of St Therese of Lisieux, whose Relics also graced the Grotto and places in Scotland in 2019. It seems most fitting that St Bernadette, whose experience of the Apparitions of Our Blessed Lady, are central to the Lourdes story, should come to Carfin during this Centenary Year and offer opportunity for an outpouring of love for our faith in Our Lord through devotion to his Blessed Mother.

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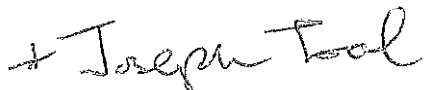
Through this year also the Church in Scotland wishes to encourage the faithful to return to Sunday Mass. The re-introduction of the Sunday Obligation from the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, 6 March, is an important step in calling everyone to renew their commitment to this necessary aspect of our Catholic Faith, which Covid has restricted. Effort will be necessary in all parishes to reach out to parishioners and welcome them back to Mass, while recognising that some may be remain hesitant. Some instruction on the Eucharist will also be desirable and opportunities offered also for acts and times of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Over the Corpus Christi weekend in June, it is planned to have a "Eucharistic Congress" at Carfin including a Procession from St Teresa's, Newarthill to Carfin Grotto. The growing devotion to Blessed Carlo Acutis, whose life was centred on love of the Holy Eucharist, will be another feature of the spiritual life of the Grotto, along with the traditional pilgrimages and monthly gatherings.

Bishop Bill Nolan's appointment by Pope Francis as the new Archbishop of Glasgow has been joyfully welcomed here in Motherwell, particularly in Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, East Kilbride, where he was Parish Priest for almost 20 years. Bishop Bill's installation as Archbishop will be on Saturday 26 February in St Andrew's Cathedral, and our prayers, particularly on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, are very much with him as he takes leave of Galloway Diocese and gets ready to move to Glasgow. I am sure we can look forward to welcoming him also in Motherwell, and possibly East Kilbride, as our Metropolitan Archbishop.

As the cost of living grows, and particularly the huge increases in energy costs loom, I thank you for you continued generosity to the Church, particularly towards your parishes and the Diocese, and I ask for your support in the times ahead. Inevitably finances have suffered due to the lockdowns and smaller congregations, and the rise in prices will affect us further. Whatever contributions you can afford will be much appreciated.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,



**+ Joseph Toal**