

PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP

to be read in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 7th October 2012, the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year

THE YEAR OF FAITH

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing to you about something special that begins this coming Thursday, 11th October. But first, I wish to express my gratitude to you, for the truly warm welcome that you have given me as your new bishop. The religious splendour and awe of the Ordination Mass, in the Cathedral on 24th September, the Feast of Our Lady of Walsingham, is still very fresh in my heart and mind. I thank you profoundly for all the Masses, sacrifices and prayers, that you have offered for my intentions, as I begin my apostolic ministry as the Eighth Bishop of Portsmouth. On all our behalf, I thank dear Bishop Crispian and I ask you to pray for him, as he enters his well-deserved retirement, after twenty-three years of generous service, as our teacher, priest and pastor. As your new bishop, I am conscious of the deep tradition of faith that has existed in this Diocese of Portsmouth with its saints and martyrs. I am also conscious of many hopes and expectations for the future. This is why I have chosen for my motto In Corde Iesu, In the Heart of Jesus. I want to remind everyone, that it is Him alone we serve. Jesus is our Lord and Master, and it is from his Heart that over the weeks and months to come, we wish confidently to draw the love, strength and creativity we need, to face the challenges ahead, assisted by the prayers of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and of St. Edmund of Abingdon.

Now this Thursday, 11th October, Pope Benedict is going to inaugurate a Year of Faith and this Year of Faith, with the new evangelisation it occasions, will be absolutely central to everything we do, as a diocese, in 2013. The Holy Father has chosen this Thursday because it is the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in 1962, which Good Pope John called, in order to safeguard the truths of faith and to present them in a manner more accessible to people today¹. The 11th October is also the 20th anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, promulgated by Blessed John Paul II, as a sure and authentic reference-text for teaching and preaching². Faith is truly today's issue: belief in God, the purpose of existence, what happens when we die, the meaning and moral value of human life, the role of religion in a secular and pluralist culture, the

relationship of faith and science, and the difference that being Catholic makes. The Year of Faith will raise all of these issues, and many more besides.

Let me say a word about Faith. Faith is a most precious gift from God, the doorway to eternal happiness³. It is the movement of the Holy Spirit in our heart, opening the eyes of our mind, and inviting us to accept and believe the Truth God has revealed to us, as proposed by the Church⁴. We use the word 'faith' in two ways: as both an objective reality ('The Faith'), meaning the mighty deeds God has done for us and the saving truths and doctrines he has revealed⁵, and also as a subjective response ('Our Faith'), the human act, by which we love God in return, choosing to follow his ways and to believe him⁶. The Year of Faith will focus on faith in both senses of the word.

First, 'The Faith,' what God has revealed: some suggestions. It would be good for all of us, priests and people, to attempt this year a systematic study of the Creed and the Catechism, receiving and learning the doctrines expressed therein, and then exploring their meaning and value for our lives today. It would be good if every church had a small bookstall with leaflets about aspects of the Catholic faith and its practice, and that we all made use of it. It would also be good, in parish newsletters, to draw attention to helpful websites and other resources. The diocesan Department for Pastoral Formation has proposed some splendid ideas in a helpful leaflet. Moreover, I will be sending to our priests and deacons, a 'Preachers Guide,' with suggestions for weekly homily notes, brief catecheses and questions for discussion-groups, together with a plan for the daily study of the Catechism.⁷

Secondly, my faith as a response to Christ and his Church. It would be good this year, for our parishes and communities to help everyone deepen their faith, by arranging periods of Eucharistic Adoration, and advertising times when the church is open for visits to the Blessed Sacrament. It would be good too for our schools to pray the Angelus at midday, recalling Mary's response of faith and to encourage staff and students to say the 'Apostles Creed,' as on the Year of Faith bookmarks. Moreover, as individuals and as communities, we should also try to make our faith more public, that is, to give witness. For example, why not wear a crucifix or a religious symbol? Or invite a non-practicing friend to accompany you to Mass? Or make the Sign of the Cross, when you are out for a meal, and say 'grace' as a family? Why not install a rosary or devotional item in your car? Why not say 'Thank God,' when someone tells you good news or 'Please God,' when they tell you their hopes and aspirations? I am sure many of you do some of these things already.

In thinking about the Year of Faith, as with everything else we do, it is important to remember that we are never saved by a programme or a structure, but only by a Person, Jesus Christ, and, as his disciple, by a personal-passionate friendship with him⁸. The Year of Faith will be a wonderful opportunity for us all to draw closer to him, to know our faith better, and to deepen its meaning and expression in our lives. Over the next twelve months, I will write again about the Year of Faith, taking as a theme, the articles of the Creed. But meanwhile, in Mass today, as we listen to God's Word and offer the Sacrifice of Christ, let us pray that this Year of Faith will lead us all to a real, life-changing encounter with Jesus, and so to receive the eternal life, love and happiness streaming from his Heart.

In Corde Iesu,
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ John XXIII *Discourse at the Opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, October 11, 1962*: AAS 54, 788-91)

² John Paul II *Fidei Depositum* 3

³ Benedict XVI *Porta Fidei* 1

⁴ *Catechism* 153

⁵ The divine plan of Revelation is realised simultaneously "by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound with each other" and shed light on each other: see *Dei Verbum* 12

⁶ *Catechism* 154

⁷ cf. CDF *Note with Pastoral Recommendations for the Year of Faith 2012*

⁸ cf. John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 29