



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
to be read in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 29th September 2013, The Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Year

CHRIST'S BODY

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ's Church,

We have now entered the last weeks of the Year of Faith and I wanted to write to you before the Year closes. I hope and pray you had a good summer. I led the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes with the sick and the young – a wonderful experience – and I also spent a week hiking in the Forest of Bowland. But for me the high-point of summer was the ordination of a new priest for our diocese, Fr. Ben Theobald: please pray for him, and for the four new students for the priesthood entering formation this autumn.

In this Pastoral Letter I want to discuss the article of the Creed: 'I believe in one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.'ⁱ Today many people find the Church a real stumbling-block to faith. Like the Modernists of the early twentieth century, they say: "Jesus yes, but the Church, no thanks".ⁱⁱ Stories in the media of appalling crimes, alleged cover-ups and gross mismanagement only breed further distrust. We believe that the Catholic Church is the Church Christ founded;ⁱⁱⁱ we also acknowledge that the Church on earth comprises wheat and tares, not only great saints performing works of love, but hypocritical souls creating confusion and corruption. Yet the Church is more than an earthly institution; we believe she is a beautiful and sacred mystery,^{iv} one that, remarkably, is still afloat on the waters of history after twenty-one centuries, and now, greater than ever. Indeed, to reject the Church is, like a soldier in the Praetorium, to give Jesus a slap in the face.^v For Jesus came not to establish a troop of lone-rangers but to fashion and form a people. He wanted the Church to be a Sacrament spanning earth and heaven, that is, a sign and an instrument of union with God and the unity of all peoples,^{vi} an effective force for justice, liberation and happiness.^{vii}

The Catholic doctrine about the Church is nowadays difficult to grasp. Modern culture with its secularism and individualism prizes personal opinion. Yet in Christianity, what counts is not my view or your view, but the Truth of Christ. To be a disciple means to be an apprentice; we freely take on the

sweet yoke of Christ,^{viii} and place ourselves 'under' His Word, which comes to us through the Church's Scriptures, Tradition and teaching.^{ix} Indeed, without the Church, there would be a real cacophony of conflicting voices. Back in the mid-third century, St. Cyprian of Carthage, in his book *On the Catholic Church*, put it like this: 'You cannot have God for your Father, without having the Church for your mother.'^x This is why we should do our best to align ourselves with the mind of the Church,^{xi} to be united with the Holy Father and with me your bishop, in order always to be in full communion with the Lord.

When we say 'I believe in one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church', what do those four 'marks of the Church' – oneness, holiness, Catholicity, apostolicity – actually mean?^{xii} Take oneness or unity. There is only one Church just as there is only one Lord and one faith. It is not the Church which is divided but Christians and so we should constantly pray and work for unity. Then, holiness. The Church is holy, because she is founded on Christ, although she has a dual nature.^{xiii} She is Divine because she is the Body of Christ, the Bride for whom Christ laid down his life, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. But she is also human, made up of people like you and me who are sometimes good and sometimes bad. As Martin Luther put it, *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the Church is always in need of reform; she is a school of holiness for sinners, a spiritual hospital.^{xiv} Thirdly, Catholicity. The Church is 'catholic,' that is, universal: her doctrine, life and worship are always and everywhere essentially the same, despite cultural diversity and local adaptation. Her mission is to everyone on earth, because outside the Church there is no salvation.^{xv} And fourthly, the Church is apostolic. Christ founded the Church on the apostles and, through their sacramental successors, the Pope and the bishops, she hands on infallibly their teaching, such that the Church today is identical with the Church of the New Testament, even if over the centuries she has grown and developed.

During these last weeks of the Year of Faith, I want to invite everyone to renew their love for the Church and to pray for her: sinners on earth, those doing penance in Purgatory, and the saints helping us from heaven. Let me offer some suggestions. Why not look up what the *Catechism* teaches about the Church or meditate on John Chapter 17? Add to your Night Prayers an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* for the Pope's intentions. Or after Mass, say the *Prayer to St. Michael* or the *Hail Holy Queen*, for the clergy of the diocese. Why not undertake a day of recollection? Is there a neighbour to whom you might pass on the parish newsletter as a form of witness? Or a practical work of charity in the parish you could help with?

One last thing. In the Diocese of Portsmouth, we need your help. We have begun a radical overhaul and renewal of the pastoral life of our diocese in order to focus all our energies on new evangelisation, on helping people develop a personal-passionate relationship with Jesus Christ. As you leave Mass today, please take a copy of the new *Framework for Collaboration*. Every member of the Church – lay and ordained, woman and man – has been chosen by Jesus and enriched with gifts and talents to serve the world we live in, especially the poor and those who have not yet heard the Gospel. In the diocese, we need to identify and release the gifts God has given and to establish teams of volunteers, willing to work together at the local and the

diocesan level. Shortly we will be putting in place the processes by which the gifts God has given the people of our diocese can be prayerfully discerned.

Today, 29th September, is the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel. Let us ask him to 'defend us in the day of battle' and to be for the Church in our land 'a safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the Devil'.^{xvi} Let us also ask the prayers of Mary, Mother of the Church, for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit that all may come to know Jesus Christ, whose Heart is our life and resurrection, in full communion with his Body, the Church.

In Corde Iesu

+ Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth

ⁱ For a comprehensive presentation of the Church's teaching about the Church, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 1997 [henceforth CCC]) 748f. The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, CTS: 2006) offers a résumé in Questions 147-193. Or see *YouCat: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, CTS: 2010) 121-145.

ⁱⁱ Alfred Loisy once said: "Jésus annonçait le Royaume et c'est l'Église qui est venue" ('Jesus announced the kingdom, but what we got was the Church'). See A. Loisy: *L'Évangile et l'Église* (Paris: Picard, 1902)

ⁱⁱⁱ The *Catechism* cites the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* n. 8, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council, which states: "The sole Church of Christ [is that] which our Saviour, after his Resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it. . . . This Church, constituted and organised as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him." See also the Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

^{iv} cf. Ephesians 5:25-27.

^v John 19: 3

^{vi} *Lumen Gentium* 1

^{vii} See for instance L. Boff *Jesus Christ Liberator* (Maryknoll, Orbis: 1978) especially Chapter Seven 'Resurrection: The Realization of a Human Utopia' p. 100f.

^{viii} Matthew 11: 28-30

^{ix} For a succinct exposition, see Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* 7-10.

^x See Cyprian *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate* 6 (PL 3: 253-4).

^{xi} In his teachings and writings, Pope John Paul II often spoke about the need *sentire cum ecclesia*, literally, to 'judge with the Church' or, rather, to think and feel with the Church and to take on her mind: see for instance *Redemptoris Missio* 36. The phrase *sentire cum ecclesia* is said to go back to St. Ignatius Loyola.

^{xii} The *Catechism* treats this extensively in CCC 811-865.

^{xiii} St. Bernard exclaimed: "O humility! O sublimity! Both tabernacle of cedar and sanctuary of God; earthly dwelling and celestial palace; house of clay and royal hall; body of death and temple of light; and at last both object of scorn to the proud and bride of Christ! She is black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, for even if the labor and pain of her long exile may have discoloured her, yet heaven's beauty has adorned her" (*in Cant. Sermo* 27: 14 [PL 183: 920D]).

^{xiv} "The Church is more than an institution because she is a mystery that is simultaneously human and divine. True love does not blind a person but rather makes him see. With regard to the Church, this is precisely the case. Viewed from outside, the Church is only a historical institution with historical achievements, but also mistakes and even crimes - a Church of sinners. But that is not looking deep enough. After all, Christ became so involved with us sinners that he never abandons his Church, even if we were to betray him daily. This inseparable union of the human and the divine, of sin and grace, is the mystery of the Church. Seen with the eyes of faith, the Church is therefore indestructibly holy." *YouCat* 124.

^{xv} St. Cyprian *Ep.* 73: 21 (PL 3, 1169). Cf. CCC 846-8. This is not to say that *literally* beyond the Catholic Church no-one can be saved, but rather that Jesus Christ and His Church are the *ordinary* means to salvation. After all, God has not limited himself to the sacramental mechanisms he has established.

^{xvi} I encourage everyone to learn and pray regularly the *Prayer to St. Michael*, ascribed to Pope Leo XIII: "Holy Michael the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle. Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust down to hell Satan and all the wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls."

Proposal as at 8th Sept 2013

