



## **PASTORAL MESSAGE TO WELCOME 'LUMEN FIDEI'**

*The following is a Pastoral Message from Bishop Philip to the priests and people of the Diocese of Portsmouth on the publication of Pope Francis' first encyclical, Lumen Fidei. This Pastoral Message was issued on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2013. The encyclical is available online from [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Faith,

On 29th June this year, the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Francis published his first Encyclical Letter to the Church, called *Lumen Fidei* ('The Light of Faith'). On behalf of the Diocese of Portsmouth, I would like to welcome this document and publicly to thank the Holy Father for his deep and meaningful teaching. An encyclical is a solemn form of papal teaching and so deserves our devoted attention. This encyclical is especially deserving as it is Pope Francis's first, although we know that unusually it also bears the imprint of his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who is said to have drafted large parts of it. The topic is 'faith' and so *Lumen Fidei* is an important contribution to the current Year of Faith which lasts until the 24th November, the Feast of Christ the King. As your bishop, I wish to encourage everyone in our Diocese of Portsmouth to read *Lumen Fidei* and to ponder the meaning of its teaching for our everyday lives as Christian disciples. There are summaries of the encyclical available online, although this is not a long document and its language is straightforward and so I would recommend reading it for yourselves, perhaps a few paragraphs a day in order to let its doctrine sink in.

The encyclical has four short chapters that deal with faith as historical, intellectual, ecclesial and practical, that is respectively, on the history of faith, the relationship between faith and reason, the communal dimension and expression of faith, especially as celebrated in the sacraments of the Church, and the practical application of faith to daily life. Its basic message is that faith is a gift from God which enables us to see the world and our place within it as it really is. Faith is seeing with the eyes of Christ. It is knowledge born of love, the love of God poured into our hearts. Christian faith and natural reason go together, complementing one another, and one without the other leads to distortion. As the Introduction to the encyclical says, many people today think faith is an illusion, a leap in the dark, a subjective feeling

that can be consoling but which actually obscures or even prevents knowledge of the 'real world' and an effective engagement with it. Yet in truth, to have faith is the opposite of this. It is to belong to a history of faith and a community of faith that goes back to Abraham, the first man of faith, and which culminates in Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, whom the Father sent us as our Saviour and Redeemer. He laid down his life for us, thus showing us God's love and the ultimate ground and reliability of our faith.

Faith is not wishy-washy, a vague feeling, a private opinion. It is a gift from God illuminating our minds and hearts, and as with two people in love, faith enables us to recognise, understand and know things that others cannot. As Catholics, we reject both religious fundamentalism (living in a literalist manner by a book or set of rules) and its opposite, liberalism (picking and choosing what I think is true). We also reject the idea that human reason and science can be absolutely autonomous or value-free. We believe that faith and reason go together. They are two forms of knowing and essentially there is no conflict between them since each in their own way is needed. Indeed, in every form and activity of human knowing, reason and belief are blended together in varying degrees and manners, from pure maths to systematic theology, from using a computer to loving your spouse. All our knowing is social; it involves elements of faith, trust and belief. Think of education and how we have to trust our parents and teachers. Or think of daily life and how we have to rely on what experts such as doctors and lawyers advise us. We believe others and trust them, at least until they show themselves to be unreliable or misleading, and our trust blends in with, and assists our own judgments and decisions.

Something I find distressing nowadays is the widespread yet mistaken belief that science gives us the truth, the facts, or at least the most certain knowledge available, whilst faith-knowledge is mere conjecture, personal opinion or in some cases an ideology leading to fanaticism. The media and in particular the BBC reinforce this myth by constantly giving air-time to scientists who dabble in amateur philosophy and shift too easily from science, on which they are well-qualified to speak, into matters of philosophy, theology and the meaning and purpose of life, in which they may have little competence. The result is that even many of our Catholic children, once they reach 12 or 13, wrongly believe that science and religion are inalienably opposed and that they have to choose one over the other. Yet the briefest glance at our Catholic Tradition with its thousands of brilliant scientists - let us leave aside for now the complex politics of the notorious Galileo case - reassures us that this is a nonsense.

I hope that the study of *Lumen Fidei* will once and for all knock on the head such false perceptions about faith and reason and enable us, as people of Christian faith, not only to take fresh heart but also to offer others in our society a much-needed corrective. We cannot allow 'scientism' (the mistaken belief that the only secure knowledge is that derived from experimental data) to dominate the air-waves and thus to distort human endeavours by 'privatising' religion and driving it out of the public domain. We need reason/science and religion/spirituality to be in a public conversation, to be in dialogue with each other, so that both can collaborate for human betterment. The social consequences of scientism will be disastrous. Scientism raises the

frightening spectre of experimentation without moral parameters, last seen during the Nazi terror and now seen increasingly in bio-medical research. Scientism will lead to a devaluation of human life and a diminished respect for the individual, not least for the elderly, the unborn child, the handicapped and the mentally ill. Since God's gifts of faith, hope and love go together, scientism will rob our children and grandchildren not only of their faith and trust but also of their hope and love, and thus deprive them of happiness.

I know some of you will think that what I saying here is extreme, but take care to reflect. What we are currently experiencing in Britain in this early 21C is an epic clash of values. There is a battle going on for the control of our hearts and minds, as society becomes more secularised and forgets its Christian patrimony, its traditional beliefs and values. We must not allow this to happen. As Catholics, we have a humanitarian mission: to witness to the natural way of life that in Christ is supernatural. It is the only way to true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment. For it is the Way which is Christ, the way of authentic humanism, the way that leads to heaven.

Let me return to the encyclical. In it, Pope Francis says that in "God's gift of faith, a supernatural infused virtue, we realise that a great love has been offered us, a good word has been spoken to us, and that when we welcome that word, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, the Holy Spirit transforms us, lights up our way to the future and enables us joyfully to advance along that way on wings of hope" (n. 7). Moreover, faith "does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing. In many areas in our lives we trust others who know more than we do. We trust the architect who builds our home, the pharmacist who gives us medicine for healing, the lawyer who defends us in court. We also need someone trustworthy and knowledgeable where God is concerned. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who makes God known to us (cf. Jn 1:18)" (n. 18). The gift of faith contributes much to science. For "faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. Faith awakens the critical sense by preventing research from being satisfied with its own formulae and helps it to realise that nature is always greater. By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation" (n. 34).

In the last chapter of the encyclical, Pope Francis portrays faith as a conviction that inspires action for justice, law and peace (n. 51), that seeks to build up the common good, to enlighten family life (n. 52), to spread fraternity and true love for others (n. 54) and to respect creation and the natural environment (n. 55). Faith brings us consolation in sickness and in the hour of our death (n. 56). It inspires us to care for all who are suffering (n. 57). The Holy Father concludes the encyclical with a beautiful paean of praise to Mary, the Model and Mother of Faith, and adds a prayer to the Virgin for a deeper faith. I commend this prayer to you and invite you now to make it your own:

"Mother, help our faith! Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognise his voice and call. Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive his promise. Help us to be touched by his love, that we may touch him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him

and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature. Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord! Amen" (n. 60).

In Corde Iesu

+ Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth