

BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS THROUGH HIS CHURCH

I'd like to thank Clare and her team for organising us today, and in advance to thank all those contributing to this day, especially Katherine Coolidge from Siena Institute, who has made the marathon journey to be with us. I also thank all of you for being here. I hope this day and the days that follow will, by God's grace, bring new energy to you and to the work of evangelisation in our Diocese especially to Evangelisation Strategy Teams and our diocesan Department and Framework Teams. I hope too that those of you who have done *Called and Gifted* might develop further in your gifts and that all of us will grow more deeply in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

A few weeks ago, I celebrated my fifth anniversary as the Bishop of Portsmouth, and to mark the occasion, I sent to the Diocese a Pastoral Letter called *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*. *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church* lays out where I believe the Lord wishes to lead us these next few years and some of the key tasks ahead. In it, for those who cannot remember, I laid out four priorities:

- first, mission and evangelisation: that we enable far more people to hear the Gospel and so to find in Jesus Christ happiness, authentic human life and one day, heaven. Of the 3.129M people who live in our Diocese, 230K are baptised Catholics. So how do we reach out to all those 2.x M other people? How can we fulfil the Lord's mandate: "Go and make disciples of all the nations; baptise them .. and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (Mt 28: 19-20). When you look at our society today, we can see so many people spiritually and morally adrift: surely as disciples we cannot stand idly by?
- the second priority is converting Catholics: that we help all Catholics become more intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, that they discern the charisms God has given them for service, and that they become more engaged in the Church's mission. I often think of Sherry Weddell's point in her *Forming Intentional Disciples* that many practising Catholics, parishioners, those who undertake prominent parish ministries, seem not to be evangelised. Surveys shew that almost 50% of *practising* Catholics do not believe in a personal God or that they can have a personal relationship with God. Almost half the people around you at Mass have little belief that God is personal, that God loves them and that He wants to enter into a personal friendship with them! So how do we convert them? But I'm especially concerned also for the not yet practicing Catholics, that they come to a deeper love for Jesus in the Eucharist. Of the 230K Catholics in our Diocese, 35K practice. Our practice rate is 13%. So what are we doing for this other 87%? How can we reach out? What are we doing?
- A third priority is total dependence on God: that we pray more, that we are dependent on the Holy Spirit, that we shift from maintenance to mission, that we are filled with joyful creativity, that we develop new ways of working. We can't keep doing what we're doing now; it's not working! So what are the risks we need to take? Can we think outside the box? What does God want us to do?

- And fourthly, to be much more focused on outward-looking service: that our parishes and schools become even greater centres of mission and service, especially to the poor, the needy, migrants and refugees. How can our schools and parishes face outwards? As an illustration, recently I visited the Salvation Army centre in Portsmouth. Their congregation is barely 100 persons but I was bowled over by the huge range of charitable activities they undertake to serve the poor, the needy, the lonely, the homeless. They have 23 visiting teams for the housebound; they run a community café, a huge charity shop and an Infants Group. The doctrine and the liturgy of the Salvation Army is far simpler than ours and yet, its members tithe their income and tithe their time to serve their church's mission. It was a vibrant oasis of Christian life. Our Diocese by contrast is massive, 100 parishes, 76 schools, 43 Religious Orders. Yet what are we doing to serve the urgent needs of those around?

So four priorities: mission, converting Catholics, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and outward-looking service. These priorities lead us to 3 specific focuses:

- First, on youth, young women and men, young singles, young married couples, young families. We have 91 parishes and 76 Catholic schools with 30,000 youth in them. Youngsters are leaving the Catholic Church in droves. So what are doing about this? How can we convert the young? How can we hand on the gift of Faith? How can we equip the young to be joyful missionary-disciples?
- Another focus, promoting vocations: that we pray for vocations to all states of life and ministry in the Church, especially the priesthood. They say we're short of priests, and indeed we are. But we're also gravely short of people, of laity truly converted to Christ, people who love the Church, people willing to take responsibility, who want the Church to work, to *be* what she is meant to be. We need many more 'can-do' Catholics. Sadly many of our clergy have become 'chaplains to the Catholic community' and many of our laity have become 'consumers of a service-provider.' I have told before the story of when I was a parish priest in Stockport, how the priest next door had to amend his Sunday Mass times so that he could also say a Mass in the hospital. His 10 o'clock Mass went to 11. A few weeks later in the village, I met an elderly couple, long-time helpers in that parish, who told me they didn't go anymore. 'Why?' I asked. 'Because 11 o'clock is too late for our Sunday lunch.' I was shocked: the habits of a lifetime, salvation in Jesus Christ, the Blessed Sacrament, dumped because it made them a bit later for lunch! Did they ever pray? Did they know Christ personally? Did they ever hear His gentle Voice calling them? So how can we foster vocations? How can we encourage more vocations, for instance, to teaching or school governorship or being a catechist?
- One more focus, prioritising resources: that managing wisely our property and resources, we use our God-given patrimony more intentionally in the service of new evangelisation. As Catholics, we are good at building things: a church, a school, a parish hall. But what about investing in people? For instance, I would like us to target more resources at our University chaplaincies, to give better formation to our teachers and school chaplains, and to house the homeless and to help migrants and refugees.

The last aspect of the vision is crucial, because it sums it all up: the need for holiness. Diocese of Portsmouth people need to be holy people. We need a greater love for God, a greater love for one another. Catholicism is always a big tent with something for everyone, full of legitimate diversity. We should never be loveless, forever complaining, those whom Pope Francis calls ‘Mr. and Mrs. Whiner’!¹ Holy persons have positive, ‘can-do’ attitudes. We should ask every day: What does Jesus want me to do? How can I help the Church’s mission?

So that is a summary of the vision ahead. The priorities of mission, converting Catholics, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and outward-looking service, lead to three focuses: on the young, on promoting vocations and on prioritising our resources. All of this above all demands us as individuals and as a community to grow in holiness. The vision is broad and open-ended. It was crystallised at the excellent Convocation of Clergy held in Windsor over the summer. It is a vision that can be summed up in one line, a strapline: *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*. It now needs to be strategized by every Deanery and Pastoral Area, by parish and school communities, by pastoral councils and other groups, and by Evangelisation Strategy Teams, Departments and Framework Teams. It is a vision that involves not only groups but I hope every single Catholic in our Diocese.

Today, we focus on ‘fruitful discipleship.’ Let me say a word about this.

When we use the term ‘evangelisation’ –spreading the Good News, witnessing to the Gospel, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ - it is important to remember that it is always a two-way activity, like breathing in and breathing out. Evangelisation is about *ourselves* being constantly evangelised, as well as ourselves constantly evangelising others. We mean here my own growth in faith as well as my witness of faith to others. We can do this in many ways, as will become evident today in the presentations we hear and in the conversations we will have with others. After all, we cannot give what we haven’t got. We cannot *bring people to Jesus through His Church* if we have not met Him ourselves, if we do not know Him, if we are not united with Him in our hearts and minds.

Clare has called this day “Fruitful Discipleship,” the title of Sherry’s new book. Her first book *Forming Intentional Disciples* was all about the call of the disciple. This new book is about the gifts and charisms Jesus gives us for service in His Church so that the disciple can become an apostle, one sent, or, to use that well-loved term of Pope Francis, a “missionary-disciple.” To be a missionary disciple, we need ardour. We need to touch base with the original experience of faith. We need a transforming encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, with a renewed sense of being called to discipleship within His Body, the Church. St. Paul said, “life

¹ “A Christian who constantly complains, fails to be a good Christian: they become Mr. or Mrs. Whiner, no? Because they always complain about everything, right?” *Homily at Mass, Vatican City, 7th May 2013*. See <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/good-christians-dont-whine-about-suffering-pope-says/> (September 2017)

to me is Christ” (Phil 1: 21); the “life I live now in this body I live in faith, faith in the Son of God, who loved me and who sacrificed Himself for my sake” (Gal 2: 20). St. Bernadine of Siena put it like this:

“The Catholic Faith consists in *knowing Jesus Christ* and receiving illumination from Him. He is the light of the world, the door to life, and the foundation of eternal salvation.”²

Each one of us needs to put the Person of Christ at the centre of our lives, and experience a passion to invite others into a transforming relationship with Him.

I have spoke before how for many of us as Catholics, this requires a changed mind-set. We find it easy to talk about the Church and its institutions, the parish, structures and lay ministries, even going to Mass and the sacraments, but what about the reality and experience of God upon which the Church is based? We quickly become focused on the Church of the Lord rather than the Lord of the Church. The result is that we become ecclesiocentric (Church-centred) rather than Christocentric (Christ-centred), and thus inward-looking rather than outward-looking. A good question to ask: Is my parish community inward-looking or outward-looking? Is it in maintenance-mode or mission-mode? Is it always the same people at Mass, or do parishioners often bring new people, friends and neighbours? Is everyone getting old, or are there lots of youngsters? Is the focus on protecting the community, the holy-huddle, or is it on reaching out to the wider world, the lost, the non-churchgoing?

But what about ourselves? Surely the key to the transformation of our parish communities begins with ourselves. Two elements can foster this. The first is developing our own prayer and spirituality, a transforming inward experience of God’s presence, love and salvation. I would like to put all the resources of the Church, the Diocese and the parish at the service of helping everyone to pray, to find God, to experience the love of God, to commit to God, to learn the art of praying, to develop a personal-passionate friendship with Jesus Christ, to grasp the meaning of His death and resurrection, to have a sense of being personally chosen by Him to be His disciple. As Catholics we have huge resources for this in two millennia of spiritual theology, in the wisdom and lives of the saints, and in a rich, profound and diverse Catholic Tradition. So I invite everyone here today to commit yourself to developing your spiritual life, to grow in prayer, in a word, to pursue holiness of life.

A huge help to this is Eucharistic Adoration. I always remember the beautiful words of St. John Paul II in his 2003 Encyclical Letter on the Holy Eucharist *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, in which he said:

“How pleasant it is to spend time with Jesus, lying close to his breast like John the Beloved Disciple, feeling in our hearts the infinite love in his Heart! How often dear brothers and sisters have I experienced this and drawn from Him strength, consolation and support! (n. 25)”

² *Sermo 49, art. 1: Opera Omnia IV, 495.* Extract from the Divine Office, Office of Readings for the optional memorial of The Most Holy Name of Jesus (3rd January) in *ICEL The Liturgy of the Hours Supplement (Grey Book) Optional and Obligatory Memorials added to the General Roman Calendar from 1984 to 2004* (Washington, April 2014)

It is a wonderful thing to be “waste time” before Our Lord and Saviour in Person. I always think that as we adore Him, He adores us, His beloved creation. I am delighted that later today we will have an opportunity to spend a short time with Jesus Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

So, first, developing our own prayer and spirituality. A second element is identifying and releasing our charisms and gifts. We need to find ways of helping each individual member of the Church to reflect on their relationship with God, to have a stronger sense of the centrality of Christ in their lives, to become an intentional or missionary disciple, and to discern the gifts, talents and charisms the Holy Spirit has given them for mission and service. This is why I am so committed to the *Called and Gifted* process, which I know we will be hearing a lot more about during today. I know too that many of you here have undergone it. I would also encourage those of you who wish or who can, to undertake regular Spiritual Direction from a sound Spiritual Director who can help you put into practice and use the gifts you have identified for the Lord’s service and the good of the Church.

One of the things I like about *Called and Gifted* is that it is not an institution-led approach – about discerning who might be called, say, to run Children’s Liturgy - but a person-centred approach. It identifies and releases the gifts of each for missionary-service in the world, at home, at work, at play. On the other hand, charisms do have an ecclesial dimension – something I would like to discuss further with Katherine and with Sherry Weddell when over next summer – and so I hope many more volunteer helpers will come forward across the diocese over the months ahead, as people put their charisms at the service of their parishes and of the Diocese as a whole.

We need to finish now as we look forward to the events of today and our time together. The Church in our Diocese has great vitality and potential. The Holy Spirit is at work in the heart of every child, woman and man, wooing them towards a personal friendship with Jesus in His Body the Church. That Spirit is already at work in our own hearts helping us grow in holiness as can-do people who want change, who want the Church to work, who want to help in any way we can. So today, as Jesus said to Peter in Luke 5, let us put out into the deep, paying out the nets for a catch! May this day enrich our work of *Bringing People to Jesus through His Church*, bringing not only others but ourselves too. Let us pray for an even greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that our own discipleship might be more fruitful so that everyone can find in the Heart of Jesus that true, genuine, lasting human happiness for which they long.

Thank you for listening.