

## Low Sunday 2007

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Although it's a little late in the day, I would like to wish you all every blessing and happiness for the great Easter season which lies ahead of us. "Christ is risen; He is risen indeed!"

Some of you who are hearing or reading this letter will have gathered on a windy and cold May Bank Holiday in Guildhall Square in Portsmouth in 1982 to celebrate with Cardinal Hume and Bishop Anthony Emery the centenary of the establishment of our Diocese of Portsmouth.

Twenty five years on, I want us to gather again in this year of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the diocese so that we can give thanks for the life of our diocese and, together, pray to the Lord for his continued blessings on the work for the Kingdom that we are trying to do.

Although I want the whole year (May 2007 to May 2008) to be one of celebration and prayer, there are two special events connected with the anniversary that I would like to draw to your attention and to encourage you to attend.

The first is a Diocesan Mass, which will be celebrated in St John's Cathedral in Portsmouth at 6.00 pm on Monday May 21<sup>st</sup> – the actual date of foundation was May 19<sup>th</sup> 1882. This Mass, with the diocesan choir and many concelebrants, will be celebrated by Archbishop Kevin McDonald, our Metropolitan and Archbishop of Southwark, who will also be the preacher. Historians among you will remember that the diocese of Southwark was established in 1850 when the Hierarchy was restored. We were formed, from Southwark, some 30 years later.

The second celebration is more in the nature of a pilgrimage which will take us back to our pre-Reformation roots. I invite you all – priests, deacons and people -to come with me to the beautiful Cathedral of St Swithun in Winchester – the most ancient Cathedral in our diocese. By gracious invitation of the Bishop of Winchester, Bishop Michael Scott-Joynt and the kind permission of the Dean, both of whom will be joining us, we will be celebrating a Liturgy of Word and Music at 7.00 pm on Friday June 15<sup>th</sup> in thanksgiving to God for our foundation as a diocese in this lovely part of England .

I will be inviting all my fellow Church leaders to join us on this occasion and I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to come.

Different worshipping communities and Pastoral Areas will be exploring many ways of celebrating our history during the coming year but I would like to put before you a pressing and particular need. I would like this year to be, in a special way a time of prayer and work for vocations to the priesthood.

Our Catholic community is nothing without Eucharist and the priests who lead us in our Eucharistic celebrations. A diminishing number of priests and candidates for the priesthood is an increasing feature of our diocesan life today. In these post Easter Sundays, we are being particularly invited to focus on the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. Although Christ the Good Shepherd "gives a royal dignity to all the people he has made his own, from us, with a

brother's love, he calls some to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands." (Preface of Priesthood).

The call to the ordained ministry comes from Christ but it is most often mediated through the prayers, sacrifices and encouragement of all of you who form our worshipping communities. I invite you all to make this vital work of prayer and encouragement a major feature of your lives.

A love and courageous commitment to the Mass has been one of the most distinctive feature of our Catholic history in England and Wales and it is entirely appropriate that the centrality of the Eucharist should be a major feature in the development of our diocesan Pastoral Plan – *Go out and Bear Fruit*.

My constant prayer – and anxiety – is that we should always have priests in sufficient numbers to meet our need for Eucharist which is at the heart of what we are as Catholics. I therefore invite you all to join me in this fervent prayer throughout this year of celebration and rejoicing for our diocese.

May the Lord continue to fill you all with the blessings of Easter joy,

+Crispian

*To be read or made available at all Masses celebrated in the diocese on the weekend of April 14<sup>th</sup> / 15<sup>th</sup> 2007*