

CIVIC MASS

I am delighted to welcome to Mass this morning Your Lordship the Mayor, and leaders and members of the City Council. --Because it gives the Catholic community of Portsmouth an opportunity to honour your self-sacrificing service of our city, and also to pray for you, and to ask God's blessing upon your work, done for our benefit most generously, though often little appreciated and little rewarded. Your presence here in our Cathedral manifests the mutually enriching relationship between the Church and the civil authority, even today within a pluralist, secular democracy. Indeed, I want today to say a word about this essential relationship between the Church and the secular, between faith and reason, between religion and life, especially as we hear the words of today's Psalm: THE PRECEPTS OF THE LAW GLADDEN THE HEART.

Obviously the Church is more than a charity, although we often work alongside the Council caring for the poor and needy. But the Church is more than this. Recall 2010 and the wonderful visit of our holy father, Pope Benedict. In his Address to the Houses of Parliament, he spoke about the natural law, written in every human heart. Each one of us, in our own way, seeks truth, goodness, love and happiness, which is why, as long as human beings exist on earth, spirituality and religion will never go away. Indeed, Catholics see faith and reason as in a mutually-enriching dialogue, each essential to the other. If you deny the role of reason in religion, you end up with a dangerous fundamentalism. But if you deny the role of religion in human reasoning, you end up with a dangerous relativism, that dissolves the very foundations of our value-systems and ethical decision-making. No, faith and reason go together, something you can see even in those who profess no religion. After all, the members of the National Secular Society believe fervently their own doctrines while many others today put a quasi-religious faith in science

Your Lordship and Leaders of the City Council, what we say about faith and reason has practical consequences. First, that the people of Portsmouth should always be free to express in public their religious beliefs, as long as they are harmless, and the Council ought happily to recognise this, indeed, to support them. Since the vast majority of our city will in some way be Christian, it means for instance we're free to offer prayers before Council meetings and free, when the time comes, to wish everyone a Happy Christmas. But secondly, we must actively resist those who seek to ignore religion, to smother it or to remove it from public discourse. Faith and reason, Blessed John Paul II once said, are "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (Fides et Ratio 1). You need both. If we allow secularists to banish religion from public life – and thus to stop a gathering of civic leaders in church like this– then we're allowing them, however well-intentioned, to impose upon public affairs a dangerous relativism that will increasingly diminish, and ultimately strangle human freedom.

THE PRECEPTS OF THE LAW GLADDEN THE HEART. Catholics believe God has revealed the Truth about Himself and about how to be human in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ His Son, and that it's above all here in Holy Mass that we receive the eternal life His Spirit brings. Thank you for being with us today. We pray

you will go forth from Mass touched by the love streaming from Christ's Heart, and thus be able to resume your generous service with new energy.