

**EACH ONE OF US IS CALLED BY CHRIST**

JESUS SAID, FOLLOW ME. AND LEAVING EVERYTHING. HE GOT UP AND FOLLOWED HIM. As you may know, since becoming bishop, I've been busy visiting all our priests. Soon I'll visit the deacons and religious, and then from the autumn our parishes and schools. Portsmouth is a big diocese from Oxford in the north to Jersey in the south. Our priests are inspiring. Every single one of them has a story to tell, sometimes a remarkable story like the call of Levi in today's Gospel, a story of how, at some point in life, a sudden inspiration or gradual realisation, Jesus has passed by and called them personally. But I'm sure it's also the same with you. Every single one of us in this cathedral has a wonderful story to tell about our call, our faith-journey, our salvation-history in which, as we look back, we can discern the hand of God at work in life.

So first, I'd like to thank you for being here today, for hearing the call, and for generously responding. Faith is a gift: after all, you can take a horse to a trough, but you cannot make it drink. You are here because Jesus has called you and you, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, have generously responded. This ongoing call and response is called discipleship. A disciple is an apprentice, a student, a learner, a listener under a master. We belong to Jesus. He is our Master. We live under his Word, and our listening and learning is a life-long exercise. What's more, we're not alone. For Jesus does not call us to be individuals but to be members of his Body, the Church under the priests, teachers and shepherds who exercise authority in His Name. Sometimes people try to divorce Christ from the Church: Jesus yes, but the Church, no! But you can never do that. That was not his will. Christ and the Church are one, so that the Church can be for all humanity a sign and instrument of union with God and communion among people. As Catholics we belong to the very family Christ founded, under the successor of Peter. That's again why I thank you. Thank you for becoming a disciple of Christ. Thank you for joining his one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

To be Catholic today is exciting, because it's totally countercultural. In this 21C, a new culture is emerging, full of promise and potential, yet post-Christian, laced with dangers that threaten human dignity and freedom. The Church has to act as a sentinel, a watchman, a lookout for both good, and evil. It's never been so urgent we witness to our faith, that we are what we profess, that we express attractively what we believe. In Britain, the Catholic Church is tiny, although on a world-scale, one in six belong to our family. Last Monday, came the dramatic news Pope Benedict is to step down: a courageous decision. As we pray for him, and for the Church preparing for a conclave, the eyes of the world and its media will be focused on us. The world knows well our Catholic moral code on abortion, contraception and gay marriage. But does it know the love of Jesus? Does it know the Gospel of happiness? Does it know about Jesus' promise of eternal life? This is why the next few weeks will be a great opportunity to witness among our friends and neighbours to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

FOLLOW ME. In this liturgy today, we thank the Lord Jesus for calling us and for the gift of our Catholic faith. Let us pray for one another, for Pope Benedict, for our diocese and for the whole Church. Let us pray for all who have helped us to reach this point in our spiritual journey. With the prayers of Mary Immaculate and St. Edmund our Patron, let us ask the Heart of Jesus, obedient unto death, to grant us the gift of perseverance in practising our faith, all the days of our life.