

IMITATING ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST

The word cathedral, as you know, comes from kathedra, a Greek word taken into Latin, meaning chair. The cathedral is the mother-church of the diocese because it contains the Chair of the Bishop. It is from here that the Bishop exercises his three-fold ministry as High Priest, Teacher and Shepherd of the flock Christ has entrusted to him, in communion with Peter and his successor, the pope. As the Catechism puts it, bishops take "the place of the Apostles as Pastors of the Church, such that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and the One who sent Him" (862). In the ancient world, teachers as a sign of authority sat down to teach and in the Gospels, we see Jesus doing exactly this in today's Sermon on the Mount. This is why the Ceremonial of Bishops suggests the bishop sits on the cathedra to give the homily: to symbolise his teaching authority.

BE PERFECT JUST AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT. In today's Gospel, from the Sermon on the Mount, there are two things for us to ponder. First, how we relate to our enemies. Jesus tells us to love them - something often difficult, not least in today's era of litigation. Some people we know are extremely difficult. Jesus tells us not to cut them off but to love them, to pray for them, to care for them. Indeed, he shows us how to do this, by forgiving the very ones who crucified him: FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO. To love those who persecute us or say bad things about us is to show mercy and mercy is the Christians' distinguishing mark. But secondly, summing up the whole Sermon, Jesus tells us that God's perfection should be our model. Every single one of us is called to be holy, to be perfect in life, to be what we're meant to be. The Lord gives us a great help to this in Confession and Holy Communion. This is why in this season of Lent, a time of renewal, we should get to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and also, as often as we can, to Holy Mass.

Dear Friends of Portsmouth Cathedral, we have here so much to thank God for, not least our beautiful Cathedral which you care for, so well. St. John's Cathedral is a beacon of Christian faith in our city, calling everyone to prayer. Drop in at any time of the day and you'll find people on their knees or quietly lighting a candle. The secular culture we live in today thrives on noise and distraction; it makes us live out-there rather than in-here. The Year of Faith and the season of Lent call us to a deeper interiority, to a renewal of our spirituality. I know you have many projects to consider. But for me, the statue of St. John the Evangelist, outside on the piazza, is a truly eloquent symbol. Every church in our diocese has a patron saint who invites us, in some way, to imitate them and to reflect their personality in our lives. Indeed, at their best, our parish communities should reflect their patrons. The young St. John was a man who truly loved Jesus with all his heart, who was known as the Lord's best friend, and to whom, at the foot of the Cross, Jesus entrusted the care of his Mother.

St. John's spirituality should inspire us and our Cathedral parish, indeed the whole diocese. I would sum it up as this: a personal-passionate love for Jesus Christ.

So in this Mass, as we call on the prayers of St. John the Evangelist, let us turn to the Heart of Jesus, the House of God and Gate of Heaven. Let us ask him for a deeper faith and interiority, for many blessings over the weeks ahead, and for happiness forever in the life to come.