

IN THANKSGIVING TO THE LORD

Christianity is not based on a book, be it the Bible, the Catechism or whatever. Neither is it based on a set of doctrines, beliefs, the teachings of the Church. Nor is Christianity based on a moral code of do's and don'ts, rules and regulations. No, first and foremost, our faith is based on a Person, Jesus Christ, God the Son made man. Every single day he calls us to be his disciple, to place ourselves under his yoke, to become a learner, a student, an apprentice. And every single day, he gives us the grace to respond to his call, his voice, his invitation, as a member of his Body the Church. It's on the basis of this personal relationship with him, within his Body, the Church, that everything else we believe follows on: the Church's teachings, her Tradition, the Bible, and the moral code by which we live. This is why as Christians, we are in the world, but not of it. We are dual citizens. We have a double identity. We belong to contemporary culture, but much more importantly, we belong to Christ as a member of his Body, the Church. Yes, this double identity does set up a tension between the culture of faith and the world we live in, a tension that goes on in-here, within the heart of each one of us. But we are happy with this because first and foremost Christ has called us. We belong to him. He is our Master and we, his disciples, follow him.

MY SOUL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD said the Psalm; ALL MY BEING BLESS HIS HOLY NAME; NEVER FORGET ALL HIS BLESSINGS. Today we come together as the Diocese of Portsmouth to GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD for being disciples of Christ who belong to him as members of his Body, the Church. We thank him for the Living Our Faith Appeal. This Appeal, hugely successful thanks to the generosity of many and the hard work of the few, is a sign to others that for us faith in Christ is the most important thing in life. It's our identity. This Appeal has enabled us to implement our diocesan pastoral plan Go Out and Bear Fruit and it has made possible parish projects, the renewing facilities fund, and the formation of both clergy and laity. We have so much to thank God for. Of course, there is still more to do, stewardship to be encouraged, pledges to be fulfilled. Yet it's right today we thank God, and pray that the mission of the Church in our diocese may flourish.

Let me add one more thought. To be a disciple today, to be Catholic, is exciting, because it's totally countercultural. In this 21C, a new culture is emerging, full of promise and potential yet fraught with dangers that imperil justice and threaten human dignity and freedom. In a context like this, the Church has to act as a sentinel, a watchman, a lookout for things both good and evil. It's never been so urgent that we know and understand our faith, that we are what we profess, that we can express what we believe. This is why the Living Our Faith Appeal is crucial. This is also why last week we announced a plan to restructure the diocesan curia into three new Vicariates: vocation, the call to discipleship, formation, the call to deepen faith, and evangelisation, the call to mission. In this way, everything we do,

even our diocesan structures, will be centred on the Person of Jesus Christ, and discipleship of him.

MY SOUL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD. ALL MY BEING BLESS HIS HOLY NAME. In this Lenten Mass, as we turn to the Heart of Jesus, the King and Centre of all hearts, let us thank him for all he has given us, and above all, for calling us to be disciples within his Body, the Church.