

**CIVIC MASS**

I am delighted to welcome to Mass this morning Your Lordship the Mayor, the Leader and the members of the City Council. --Because it gives the Catholic community of Portsmouth an opportunity to honour you and your service of our city, and also to pray for you, as you serve the needs of the people of this city. I personally have always had a huge appreciation for those in local government, who work so tirelessly for everyone's benefit, yet are often little appreciated and little rewarded. So today we thank you for all you do to make Portsmouth a wonderful place to be, and we happily offer up this Holy Mass for you, for your families and friends, and for all your intentions.

Let me say a word about the Gospel reading we have just heard, in which Jesus cured ten lepers although only one of them, interestingly a foreigner, came back to say thanks. PRAISING GOD AT THE TOP OF HIS VOICE, [he] THREW HIMSELF AT THE FEET OF JESUS AND THANKED HIM. One of the most disturbing consequences of the current eclipse of religion in our culture is the gradual disappearance of those human qualities and Christian virtues that hold a society together, such as respect for others, respect for elders, respect for authority, respect for public property. Going with this is a loss of the sense of gratitude. All we have – the gift of life, the gift of the natural world, the gift of our health and well-being, the gift of the material wealth we enjoy – all is God's gift. Every night we should thank God in our prayers for all we have received and for all that we have achieved. For without a sense of gratitude in our lives to the God who has been so generous to us, we would easily believe that what we have is the result of our own efforts, and that for what we lack, we have only ourselves to blame.

Before I became Bishop of Portsmouth last year – how time has flown! - I was a parish priest near Stockport (up North) and I welcomed a priest newly arrived from Nigeria. Fr. T had never been to Europe before and after collecting him from the airport, I took him for a meal in a local pub. I'll never forget his eyes when he saw the prices: they were like soup-plates. It wasn't a posh pub - the main courses were only about £7 – but he said: FATHER THIS IS A PUB FOR MILLIONAIRES! My point is most of us in this country enjoy a level of comfort and a standard of living unimaginable to our forebears, let alone to those from the world's South. For this, we should be truly thankful to God. But we should also remember we have a duty to be good stewards of what God has given us, and to use what we have for God's glory. In a city like Portsmouth, there are many opportunities for us to exercise good stewardship, especially works of charity, and the service of the needy.

ONE OF THEM THREW HIMSELF AT THE FEET OF JESUS AND THANKED HIM. The original Greek here uses a word very special to Catholics: εὐχαριστέω ('giving thanks'). The word eucharistein means to give thanks. It's another word for the Mass, in which we give thanks for the life, death and resurrection of Christ our Saviour. The Holy Eucharist is the most perfect prayer of thanks and praise. So as we offer up this Mass, let's, from the bottom of our hearts, give thanks and praise to God for the gift of life, for the gift of all we have, and above all for the gift of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Indeed, in this Mass, as we also give thanks for the work of our City Council, let's cultivate every day in prayer, a spirit of profound gratitude to God for all he's given us.