

### **CONSECRATION TO THE SACRED HEART**

Today, in this Guildhall, we offer Pontifical Mass for the people of Southampton. We do so in honour of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, and in thanksgiving for all the graces we have received during the Year of Faith, ending today. I thank profoundly Fr. Vincent, Fr. Des, the clergy, and all of you for organising this historic public liturgy, that brings together the Catholic community from all over this great city.

In a moment I want to make a special announcement. But first, a word about the liturgy and those astonishing words of Jesus: *I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise*. Every human being wants to be happy. Everyone deep down seeks fulfilment. Every child, woman and man on earth wants to love and to be loved, wants immortality, wants to be united with God, their Father and Creator and to hear those words of Jesus spoken to them. For *He is the image of the unseen God; ... he is the first to be born from the dead; ... in him we gain our freedom, the forgiveness of sins*. Jesus Christ is our God. Jesus Christ is King. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. By dying, he destroyed our death and by rising he has opened for us the gates of Paradise. We are so blessed! We are so happy! We are so privileged to have the gift of the Catholic faith, which promises immortality, indeed everything we could ever hope for.

In a moment, we'll conclude the Year of Faith by consecrating our selves and our diocese to the Sacred Heart of Christ. Some might dismiss this as pietistic, but they are wrong: don't listen to them! In Britain today, we have so much to thank God for, but we must also recognise, in the new secular culture ascendant, perils and dangers to human freedom and human flourishing. In asking everyone to consecrate themselves to the Heart of Christ, I only want to strengthen our Christian identity. I want to deepen our love for Christ and His Church. I want to ask you to put Jesus first, to acknowledge Him as your Lord, to profess Christ alone to be the Way, the Truth and the Life. Faith is never a hobby; it's never an added extra; it's never something to do when we can. You and I are special! We've been chosen! We've been picked for a specific task and purpose. In a word, Jesus calls us into a personal-passionate friendship with Himself so that we can be with Him forever in heaven.

I now want to announce something. --Because people ask how in the Diocese of Portsmouth we might follow-up the Year of Faith. So I'd like to announce, starting today, a Year of Action, a Year of Good Works, a Year of putting faith into practice through deeds of justice and charity in the local community. It's hard to imagine anywhere better than Southampton to launch this. 2014 is the fiftieth anniversary of the city's Royal Charter and, I can announce, it will be here, in Holy Family, Millbrook, that we will soon establish our diocesan Caritas Agency to radicalise, direct and develop the charitable activities of the diocese.

In his social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict called us to social action and the service of the poor: indeed, Pope Francis daily urges us to reach out to those on the margins. This is why we need to follow up the Year of Faith with a Year of Faith in Action. Here in Southampton, you are ahead of the game, so generous in charity, hard-at-work for the Kingdom of Jesus. You set us a great example. We think of your care of the homeless and the housebound, the Poitier food-bank, your support of CAFOD, the Medaille Trust, the work of the SVP, the EU Welcome Centre for migrants, the Apostleship of the Sea, just to mention a few. This is not to forget the civic and ecumenical partnerships that serve the socially and materially deprived in these difficult economic times, like the Two Saints Charity, the St. Joseph's Innovation Centre and the Just Centres project. None of this is about ourselves, or do-good-ery. These are the works of Christ and the Holy Spirit, expressions of our faith in action. For the Jesus we serve in the poor is the Jesus we serve in the Eucharist and the Jesus we love in the Eucharist is the Jesus we love in the poor. *This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.* In this Mass, in which the Good Shepherd lays down his life for us on the altar, let's welcome the love of Jesus into our hearts so that we can go out from here to put our faith into practical action. Let us ask Him, whose Heart is full of compassion, to help us take His love to the poor and needy, to the sick and housebound, to the unjustly treated and anyone on the margins. Indeed, let us pray that through our service of Christ in the poor, over the next few months, we may one day merit to hear Him say to us: *I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise.*