

YOU ARE THE CHRIST

As we offer Mass today, we're very conscious of the epic humanitarian crisis across Europe and the Middle East, as thousands of refugees flee war and violence, many making perilous sea-journeys, desperate and destitute. The migrant-refugee crisis is fraught and complex, politically and culturally, but while some countries have been very generous, I cannot help but feel our own response in Britain could be *greater*, especially when you see children suffering or the appalling conditions in refugee camps. In our Diocese of Portsmouth, the hearts of all are broken by this. Yet mindful of the parable of the Good Samaritan, in collaboration with local government, we'll respond as generously as we can. Indeed, already we've set up a committee to coordinate the relief efforts of individuals, parishes, schools and religious communities, and I announce in two Sundays time a special Day of Prayer for migrant refugees, asking God for the grace to resolve the causes of this crisis.

*If one of the brothers or sisters [needs] clothes and has not enough food to live on and you say 'I wish you well; keep warm and eat plenty' but don't give them the necessities of life, what good is that?* The 2ndR reminds us, faith leads to action: we must put our money where our mouth is. But St. James also reminds us of a core truth of Christianity: that it's the poor *God chooses to be rich in faith*. Jesus showed a love of preference for the poor. He came to proclaim the Good News to the poor. So who *are* the poor? What do we mean by poverty? We often kid ourselves *we're* poor; we could do with a few bob and compared to the mega-rich you see on TV, we *are* poor. Yet compared with migrants, refugees and millions living elsewhere on Earth, all of us in Britain are incredibly rich. We enjoy an unimaginable depth of affluence, despite our hardships. But as Pope Francis teaches in *Laudato Si*, his stunning Encyclical letter on the care of the environment, there's another type of poverty, a poverty resulting from wealth and comfort, a poverty caused by a consumer society that smothers the religious sense, that blocks out the sacred canopy, that undermines ethics and distorts our moral compass. In our society many are *spiritually* poor. Many are religiously illiterate. Many are adrift, with no spiritual home. Yet as human beings we are made for God; we are made to pray; we are made to seek truth, goodness, love; we are made to want happiness and to reach heaven. When in today's Gospel, Jesus asked: *Who do you say I am?* Peter's reply was full of excitement and delight: *You are the Christ*. You are the Son of the living God. You are the Saviour of the world - and of me.

It is a great joy for the Catholic community to have with us at Mass today Your Lordship the Mayor, the Leader and members of the City Council, our beloved MPs and other civic dignitaries. We thank you for all you do to serve our great city. We thank you for looking after Portsmouth's poorest and neediest. We thank you for respecting our Christian faith, and in this Mass we pray for you. But we ask you: please help create a society open to the Transcendent, open to God, open to the spiritual and to religion. Without this, human beings will never be happy; we'll never realise our full potential; we'll never secure the values that will help our country flourish. In this Mass, we pray for you, for the Queen and the government, and for all who serve in public office. We pray for our sisters and brothers in the other Christian communities, and for those of other religions, and none. We pray for the spread of the Gospel, and for ourselves too, that we might better express our faith in good works, just like Jesus, whatever the cost.