

MASS IN THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Christianity is not a religion of the book, be it the Bible, the *Catechism* or whatever. Nor is it based on doctrine, on beliefs, the teachings of the Church. Nor is our faith fundamentally a moral code of do's and don'ts, rules and regulations, practices and customs. Catholicism is first and foremost based on a Person, Jesus Christ and on a personal relationship with Him. This is the difference between the old evangelisation and *new* evangelisation. The *new* evangelisation Pope Francis and the Church is calling us to is not ecclesio-centric. It's not about 'church.' It's not about filling the pews, enhancing the parish, recruiting more helpers for the Children's Liturgy. It's about Jesus. It's about making Jesus Christ better known and better loved. It's about the love of Jesus, a transforming encounter with Him, about hearing Him call us personally to be His disciple in a life-long friendship within His Body the Church. Only then does everything else follow on: the Church's teachings, her glorious Tradition, the Scriptures and the moral codes by which we live. This is a very difficult attitudinal shift to communicate to the faithful. Indeed, I suggest, one of the chief reasons why Mass attendance has declined, and why we have so few converts, is because we fail to focus on the one thing necessary: the Person and Love of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour.

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; he sells everything-he-owns and buys that field. I'm happy in this Year of Consecrated Life, on this feast of St. Theresa of Avila, in the 500th year of her birth, that all the wonderful religious of our wonderful Diocese of Portsmouth gather here today for Mass! We are proud of you! And in you, our Diocese has *so much* to thank God for. We thank God for your prayers, your witness, your work. There are 43 communities in the Diocese, three new ones this year: the Marian Franciscans, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate, and the Sisters of Mary Morning Star. People can get pessimistic. They say religious life, it's over. It's in decline. It's disappeared: we now have lay ministry. Yet to this, today we say No. You're wrong. We proclaim to the Church and the world: by God's grace, we're here! We're alive! We're joyfully at your service! Consecrated and religious life continues to be vibrant. It's a vital part of the Church's mission. It's a huge enrichment of our diocesan outreach.

Just over 100 years ago, a gifted pianist then 22, entered the Carmel in Dijon, taking the name in religion of Elizabeth of the Trinity. She only lived another 4 years, but underwent a transforming experience. She'd been meditating on the Sacrament of Baptism, that when a person is baptised, the Blessed Trinity – FS&HSp - comes to dwell within their heart. This teaching, the indwelling of God in the baptised, symbolised by clothing with a white garment, and symbolised in another way by the religious habit, is a truth of faith we often neglect, although the Fathers of the Church teach it and it was central to John Henry Newman's spirituality. Once you realise this, Elizabeth said - that the Trinity makes Its home within us, that we're never alone, that wherever we go we bring God's transforming love into the situation – then life can never be the same again. Her simple prayer is famous: *Lord, make me Your heaven*. At her beatification in 1984, Pope JP2 repeated that prayer, *Lord, make me Your heaven*, saying that of all the saints of 20C, Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity was one of the greatest.

So let me add a request, before drawing all this together.

For at this time our Diocese of Portsmouth urgently needs your help. We need your prayer, your witness, your holiness. We need you to show us how best to serve the poor, the needy, the marginalised, how best to care for God's creation and nature, and how best to promote a just and sustainable world-order. But we also need your expertise and practical support, not least with the Spiritual Formation Team that Fr. Bruce is engaged in, with the various chaplaincy departments, with our Youth service and our Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility team. The vocation to live the evangelical counsels as a hermit, virgin, monk or religious is a Divine mystery and a uniquely personal call. But I beg you: please reflect on the charisms God has given you and consider in prayer how you can generously put your gifts and time at His service.

The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; he sells everything-he-owns and buys that field. The treasure is Jesus Himself, He Who calls us to a personal-passionate, life-long and salvific friendship with Himself. Through baptism and through the evangelical counsels, He makes His home in our heart, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And He sends us out transformed as missionary-disciples to bring His loving mercy to everyone we meet. So in this Mass, let's make our own that prayer of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity: *Lord, make me Your heaven*. Let's drill down beneath

the surface-layers to the Temple of God's presence within, the indwelling Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And as we thank God for our consecration, praying too for the clergy and people of our Diocese, let's ask Him to enrich our diocesan work of new evangelisation with many more persons and communities consecrated to Him in chastity, obedience and poverty.