

Rite of Election
St John's Cathedral
12th March 2011

This is my 23rd celebration of the Rite of Election in this Cathedral and in the diocese and, this year we are seeing the largest numbers I have known coming forward for the final stage of the journey to the Easter Sacraments. This year, we have 81 Catechumens who are those who will be seeking baptism at Easter, 133 Candidates who are those already baptised but who are seeking to come into full communion with the Church, and, in addition, there are 61 Anglicans – or perhaps we should now describe them as former Anglicans – who are seeking full communion with the Church through the Ordinariate.

As ever, I welcome you all to our celebration today but I want to offer a special word of welcome to the three communities from the Ordinariate – from Reading, from Ryde and from Christchurch – who are here today with their priests who will, God willing, be ordained in June. We also have among us today the former Anglican Bishop of Richborough, Fr Edwin Barnes, who was ordained in this Cathedral last Saturday.

Wherever you are coming from and whatever has been the character of your journey of faith, we are blessed by your presence. You bring a huge variety and experience of Christian life and your own personal journeys of faith to this celebration, to your parishes and communities, to the diocese and to the Church. You all have much to offer.

The “what” of what you are doing is to join the community of the Catholic Church. But that’s only part of the story because we believe that the Catholic Church is the Body of Christ made visible in the world. At the heart of that Body is the person of Christ himself. He, Jesus Christ the Lord, is calling each one of you personally, inviting you to come to see where he lives, to spend the rest of your lives with him. For a long time, you have been following in his footsteps, spurred on by your own John the Baptists. In the end, he turns, recognises you and loves you and calls you so that you come here today.

What do you want? The short answer is communion with him in the Church. He longs to give you that and, at the same time, he invites you to meet his friends, some of whom you will like and some whom you won’t. But this is the community of the disciples of Christ; that’s where we all belong and that where Jesus invites us to be. What has probably seemed to you as an intensely personal journey becomes now a journey into a community, in which you all have an important part to play and to which you bring great gifts.

As Bishop, I represent that community and now with my authority as bishop, I invite you to join us. I will be listening to the witness and testimony of your godparents and sponsors and they will speak warmly and sincerely of the integrity of your journey of faith, which they have shared with you.

In the light of all that they have to say, albeit expressed in somewhat formal language, I now invite you to journey to the Easter celebrations with this whole gathered community and with the community of the diocese. We can now experience together in these days the slipping away of the darkness and its replacement with new light and new life.

Welcome to the light which we will do our best not to obscure for you. Welcome to the Lenten journey which we undertake with you. Join with us as we journey to Easter through this time of Lenten purification and enlightenment. Come with us to the new life in Christ which comes with our celebration of the Easter Sacraments. You are all most welcome.