



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
 appointed to be read aloud and in its entirety
 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
 on 26th October 2014, The Thirtieth Sunday of the Year

THE BLESSED MOTHER - SHARING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

Dear Friends,

I am sure that this is the first time ever a Pastoral Letter from the Bishop has come with a free gift - but more on that in a moment!

For we are now coming to the end of the month of October when, as in May, our hearts and minds customarily turn to the Woman but for whom we would not be here.¹ I mean the Blessed Mother, she who gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Saviour Whose life, death and resurrection has divided human history into a 'before' and an 'after'. Mary of Nazareth was the perfect mother for God the Son Incarnate and a model mother for us.² Blessed among women, she created a loving home and brought Him up, and with Joseph her spouse gave Him a trade and inserted Him into the civic, cultural and religious life of His time. Devoutly following Jesus in His public ministry, pondering in her heart everything He said, supporting Him from the foot of the Cross, and after the Resurrection praying with the early Church for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Mary is the true Christian disciple.³ Brave and determined, passionate about truth and justice, she is a model of womanhood even for today's radically different world.⁴ No wonder Mary is the best loved member of the Church! No wonder Christians ever seek her powerful intercession! No wonder the Eastern liturgy acclaimers her: "O sanctified Temple, O mystical Paradise, .. in You, Woman full of Grace, all creation rejoices!"⁵

As you leave church today, I am offering you a free gift. It's a CD for use at home or in the car, and I am grateful to the young students of St. Peter's, Bournemouth for their help. I want to encourage you to use this CD often, perhaps especially when driving - though do drive safely! It will help you

reflect on the joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the Catholic faith, for the CD contains the Rosary. As you know, the Rosary is a prayer centred on Jesus, who is honoured by a bow of the head in every *Hail Mary*. For centuries, the Rosary has helped Christians grow in the spiritual life. It is a deeply scriptural prayer, as Pope Pius XII said, the “compendium of the entire Gospel”.⁶ You can say it alone, with a friend or with others.

In my episcopal Coat of Arms *In Corde Iesu*, you'll notice in the top left hand corner a bright yellow star. It's like the Star of Bethlehem that led forth the Magi, when illumined by faith, they set off for a distant land to seek the Infant Jesus. But on the Coat of Arms, the star in fact represents Mary Immaculate, the principle Patron and Leader⁷ of our Diocese. She is the Star of the Sea, guiding us across the tumultuous waters of life, the seven points representing her seven sorrows and seven joys. She is also Star of the New Evangelisation, the one who leads everyone to Jesus her Son, the Good News for Whom every human heart yearns.⁸ In the weeks ahead, I invite you to contemplate Mary, that *Stella Matutina* or Morning Star, filled with the joy of the Gospel, guiding people to Christ. Indeed, as you pray the Rosary, pray especially that the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit may disturb the hearts of those with little or no faith, that all may come to know, serve and love Jesus Christ in the full communion of His Body, the Church.

That reminds me: I need to make an announcement. For we are now approaching the end of our Year of Faith in Action. I thank God for all the wonderful works of outreach, justice and charity that have been taking place across the Diocese of Portsmouth these last months in service of the needy. As Jesus said, you will always have the poor with you and this should constantly stimulate us to practical love of neighbour. But as we enter the new liturgical year, I want to ask you in addition to give special attention to prayer, in fact, to undertake a year of prayer so that the new evangelisation in our Diocese can really take root. When we pray, we are meant to be taken out of ourselves, the words facilitating a person-to-person encounter with God,¹⁰ the Rosary is like this, the repetitious words occupying our mouths so that our hearts and minds can be lost in the Mystery. One thing I would really hope for from this Year of Prayer is that we will all become less inward-looking and more outward-looking, that is, people who constantly pray for the salvation of those around us. We should work and pray earnestly for the evangelisation and conversion of England, that all may have the chance to hear the Gospel. Indeed, to this end over the next months, the Department of New Evangelisation is going to lead us in a fresh endeavour called “Sharing the Joy of the Gospel.” Today as you leave church, please take a prayer-card.

So to end. Prayers through Mary never fail, so call often on her powerful help. I hope you will find the CD useful.¹¹ But why not install a Marian statue or icon in your home? Or hang a rosary from the rear-view mirror in your car? Or in the appropriate season, sing the *Salve Regina* at the end of Mass? Or help establish a local Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility group under Marian patronage?¹² Or carry in your pocket a rosary-chaplet, a witness at work or an airport security line? The Church in our time is calling us to an evangelisation “new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression”.¹³ This is why we need enormous creativity. In this, the Blessed

Virgin Mary, Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, Temple of the Spirit, is our paradigm and help, leading us from the front, sharing the joy of the Gospel.

In Corde Iesu
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth.

¹ Why is the month of October associated with the recitation of the Rosary? See Paul VI *Recurrrens Mensis October* (available at <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/documents>). This Apostolic Exhortation of 1969 was written to commemorate the fourth centenary of *Consueverunt Romani*, an apostolic letter from St. Pius V, who explained and fostered the traditional form of the Rosary.

² For a clear and succinct summary of the Church's doctrine on Mary's motherhood, see *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* 94-100 (London, CTS: 2006)

³ For Mary's role in the life and mystery of Christ, see John Paul II *Redemptoris Mater* 7-28 (available online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals)

⁴ Cf. Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* 288 (London, CTS: 2013)

⁵ This hymn is sung in Great Lent by all Eastern Christians during the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, following the consecration of the Holy Gifts. It is attributed to St. John Damascene, and has recently been beautifully set to music by Sir John Tavener (d. 2013).

⁶ Pius XII *Philippinas Insulas (Letter to the Archbishop of Manila)* AAS 38 (1946) 419; cfr. Paul VI *Mariialis Cultus* 42, 44-46 (London, CTS: 1974)

⁷ As St. John Paul II once said: “This Marian profile is also – even perhaps more so – fundamental and characteristic for the Church than is the apostolic and Petrine profile to which it is profoundly united.... The Marian dimension is antecedent to the Petrine dimension, although closely united with and complementary to it. Mary Immaculate precedes all others, including obviously Peter himself and the apostles. This is so, not only because Peter and the apostles, being born of the human race under the burden of sin, form part of the Church which is ‘holy with sinners,’ but also because their triple function has no other purpose except to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already preformed and prefigured in Mary. A contemporary theologian has well commented: ‘Mary is ‘Queen of the Apostles’ without any pretensions to apostolic powers: she has other and greater powers’ (von Balhasar, *Nette Klarstellungen*, Ital. transl., Milan 1980, p. 181).”

⁸ John Paul II *Address to the Cardinals and Prelates of the Roman Curia*, 22nd December 1987 (AAS 80 [1988]: 1028) DS 4841.

⁹ Pope Francis has written a wonderful prayer to Mary, Star of the New Evangelisation: see *Evangelii Gaudium* 288.

¹⁰ Cf. Mt 26: 11, Mk 14: 7 and Jn 12: 8.

¹¹ If you do not have a compact disc player, don't worry! You can download the entire recording onto media of your choice from the diocesan website: www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

¹² This would be an excellent project to discuss with your parish priest. For further help and advice, contact the diocesan Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility team: jpsr@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk

¹³ See John Paul II “The Task of the Latin American Bishop”, *Address to CELAM*, 9th March 1983; English translation in *Origins* 12 (4 March 1983) 659-62.