

Address to UCM

I'd like to thank you for inviting me to speak to you today, and even more for your witness to Christ as disciples and Catholics. Since becoming bishop last autumn, I've been going round the diocese meeting our priests one-to-one in their parishes and natural habitats, for an hour together, for prayer, a cup of tea and a chat. I'm most of the way round now and so I've also started visiting our deacons and religious communities. Soon, I'll start the parish and school visitations. I wanted to begin with the priests because as co-workers with the bishop, the priests share Christ's priesthood. Indeed, I want to try to do everything I can to help and support them. I'm pleased to say we have some fantastic priests! It's not a good analogy, but according to OFSTED our school in Romiley, the parish I used to be in near Stockport, was outstanding. This was because the children were happy and the parents were happy, but they were happy because the staff were happy and the staff were happy because the Head looked after them. It's not a good analogy, but if as bishop I can look after the priests, and they are OK, perhaps you, the people of the diocese, will be OK too!

To tell you something about myself, I come from Altrincham, Cheshire, where my father still lives, and my three brothers, their wives and families. I was, as you know, a priest of Shrewsbury Diocese, ordained in 1984. I've done many different things as a priest. I was an assistant in Wythenshawe, then at Fisher House assistant chaplain to the University of Cambridge, and afterwards for 3 years a full-time hospital chaplain in Birkenhead. I've spent a couple of years in the philosophy department of Boston College Ma., and for 12 years, I was on the formation staff of Oscott College, Birmingham, where I was the Dean of Studies and Professor of Fundamental Theology. In 2008 I was given the best job in the world, parish priest. That was at Our Lady and St. Christopher's, Romiley, near Stockport, on the edge of the Peak District. In 2010, we had a new Bishop, Bishop Mark Davies, and he made me VG. We only had one VG in Shrewsbury, unlike three here: clearly the priests and people of Portsmouth are more troublesome than those of Shrewsbury!

Being a bishop still seems strange! As VG, I would sometimes be teased that one day this would happen: that anytime now an Italian would be phoning from Wimbledon. When it happened, it was actually a Nigerian, Mgr. Brian Udagwe, on a busy Friday morning, 6th July. "We have a problem we'd like you to help us with!" 'Yes?' I said. "No, we need you to come down to the Nunciature." I said I was very busy: I could come next Thursday. He then said, "No, come to lunch!" I then realised this was serious, so I said I'd come as soon as I could; it'd probably be early afternoon. In the Diocese we'd had some difficult problems with our Trustees and I genuinely thought

it was about that. So I grabbed all the documentation I could, and set off. I had to cancel my appointments, and taking the next train, I got there at 2.15 pm.

Lunch was strange, the nuncio and I eating, but Mgr. Brian and another priest watching from across the table. The fish I had was full of bones, as if it had a double skeleton! The Nuncio told me the 'oly father wanted me to be the next Bishop of Portsmouth. I said 'Oh! I've never been to Portsmouth'; he said, You'll like it! So I spent an hour in the chapel and then came out and said yes, and wrote the letter of acceptance. I left at 4, and decided to go immediately to Westminster Cathedral to visit the Shrine of St. John Southworth, to whom I've always had a great devotion since being a university student in London. He was a priest from the north martyred in the south. After that, I caught the train back to Stockport, though being under the papal seal, I couldn't tell anyone. I asked if the Pope might announce the news the following Wednesday, 11th July, the Feast of St. Benedict. And that was it! The following weekend, I told the parish and in early September I went on retreat. I moved into Bishops House on 21st September last year - here we are!

People ask me about my vision. This first year, the Year of Faith has been central. I've issued five Pastoral letters on it. Another important theme for me is new evangelisation and in our restructuring of the diocesan curia, there is now a Department of New Evangelisation (NE). Some of you may have heard me speak about NE before, in the Lent Talks on 'Being Catholic in a Secular Culture.' Basically it means a new type of evangelisation to meet the new secular culture. John Paul II said we need today a new evangelisation, an evangelisation that is new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression. These days, many people know the basics of Christianity but they find it irrelevant. They rarely even think of God or are indifferent. They may even be baptized, but they drift away or never practice the Faith. As so-called 'lapsed Catholics,' they might be connected with the school, but they are not, or not yet, in a real, living relationship with Christ in the Holy Eucharist. All these people are sacramentalised but not yet evangelized.

NE is not another scheme or programme. As John Paul II once said:

"We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula, but by a Person, and the assurance that he gives us: I am with you! It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new programme" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* 29)

So not a programme but a Person, Jesus Christ. Moreover, as with all evangelisation, NE is a two-way movement: *ad intra* and *ad extra*, like a heartbeat, reaching-in reaching-out. Evangelisation is always ourselves being evangelized, growing and deepening in our faith, a life-long process. And at the same time, it is also about

reaching out to others (*ad extra*) to propose to them the Person of Christ and his Gospel.

John Paul II spoke of new ardour, new methods and new expressions. In a sense his meaning is clear. He's calling us to a

- new passion for our faith, so we will naturally be able and willing to reach out to others.
- new ways of communicating the Gospel, including the use of new media and new methods. For this, we have the enormous wealth and resources of our Catholic Tradition.
- He is also calling us to be more aware of the culture we live in. A key reason for the attrition of faith and practice in our schools and parishes is a doe-eyed lack of awareness of culture: that as Catholics we are different; we are a distinctive community; we are countercultural people.

In a book published last year called Forming Intentional Disciples, Sherry Weddell argues that the era of tribal Catholicism is now over. 75% of Catholics do not practice, and over half of these no longer identify themselves as Catholic. Interestingly, many ex-Catholics are converting to evangelicalism. The reasons for this, her research shows, are not because of what the Church teaches, or the abuse-crisis, or a marriage issue, but surprisingly, because they say their spiritual needs were not being met. A staggering 40% of practising Catholics say, when asked, they do not really have much of a personal relationship with God. Despite going to Mass every week or being involved in parish ministries, some do not believe in a loving or a personal God with whom they can have a life-changing friendship. In any parish, she says, the number of key disciples is about 5%.

If Weddell is right, then it seems to me that the time has come to put all the Church's resources at the service of helping people to pray, to find God, to connect with him, to commit to him, to learn the art of praying, to develop a real, personal-passionate relationship with Jesus, to acquire a strong sense of what it means to be chosen by him. As Catholics we have huge resources for this, not least in the lives of the saints and in two millennia of spiritual theology. In this respect I've asked our priests to try and keep the churches open during daylight hours, to make leaflets on prayer and other helps available, and to teach people the basics of prayer, meditation, and so on. The key is helping people develop a vibrant friendship with the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Many of us find it easy to do church-talk, sacraments and theology. But how often do I speak about my prayer, spirituality and love of God?

As a newcomer, my first impressions of the Diocese of Portsmouth are very positive. Portsmouth feels like a modern diocese, one that's genuinely tried to grapple with some of the challenges the Church currently faces. Obviously, a new bishop is an

opportunity to reflect on where we're up to, especially the Pastoral Plan Go and Bear Fruit, which is now almost 10 years old. I'm keen to develop the system of Pastoral Areas, although some fine-tuning is needed.

One difficult thing I have had to do since becoming bishop has been to implement the Trustees Review. Because the diocese was running at a deficit, Bishop Crispian and the Trustees developed a plan to reshape the diocesan curia. This involved seven redundancies, and sadly I had to bite the bullet. However, this has given us a wonderful opportunity to develop a new structure, the Framework for Collaboration, which will roll out over the next years, based on groups of lay-led teams who will take forward the various pastoral activities. We now have three new Vicariates (Vocation, Formation, Evangelisation), and next year, Sherry Weddell herself and a team from the States are coming over to help us discern the gifts given to the laity and to help form the team-members. In this, I hope very much that you members of the UCM will be able to help us and to volunteer to help at either diocesan or local level, especially in the matters that are characteristic of the UCM: justice and peace, marriage and family life, and upholding Christian values in our society.

Let me end with an image. Once on holiday in Scotland I saw the amazing sight of salmon in a river: thousands of wild salmon in a river, swimming upstream, racing ahead, jumping in the air to get past the rocks and over the boulders. Salmon, I am told, lay their eggs upstream, and once hatched, the new salmon swim down to the sea on a huge journey to the feeding-grounds off Greenland. They then have two months to get back to the river they were born in, to lay their own eggs and after to die. How they know their home-river is a mystery, but that's why you see the amazing sight of fish swimming upstream, jumping in the air, racing against the current. It made me think that WE are a bit like salmon in that deep down in every human heart is a spiritual homing-device. We are made for God, who is our Father; we are made for heaven. Our home is in him, and our hearts are restless until we find him. But to find him and to do this in our busy, secular culture, means swimming upstream against the current. It's not easy being a disciple today, because we are in a very challenging cultural context. To find God today, to develop a friendship with him, to live the life of Christ, to reach heaven our true home, we have to stand out, to create space and time.

So I ask you: please deepen your faith, sink your roots into the Lord, yimbibe his teaching. The world offers many tempting options. To remain faithful to Jesus requires energy. It may seem at times as if we are flogging a dead horse. Yet we know He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We know too the Holy Spirit is at this very moment at work in people's hearts wooing them towards Christ and His Church. When the going seems tough, it is important to remember that it is not the product we are offering that is defective but the ability of people in our busy, secular consumer-culture to hear and receive it. That is why today, as Catholics we need to

pray for enormous creativity if we are to communicate imaginatively the Person of Jesus Christ to the peoples of 21C. Indeed, let us pray earnestly to the Holy Spirit that he will better-equip us to face the exciting challenges ahead.

Thank you for listening!