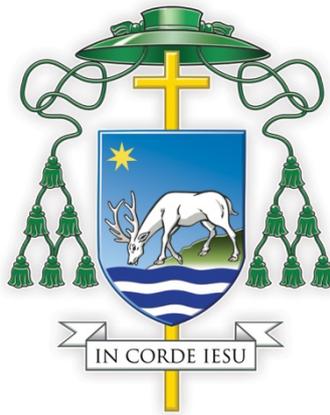


BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan BA, STL, PhD



MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PHILIP

to the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Portsmouth
about the Canonisation of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II

On behalf of the whole Diocese of Portsmouth, I would like to express delight and gratitude to God for the canonisation of Blessed John XXIII and Blessed John Paul II this coming weekend, Divine Mercy Sunday, 27th April, by Pope Francis. Here we have great popes of living memory. In them the Church is not only being given two powerful intercessors in heaven but also for us on earth two inspiring examples of Christian discipleship and priestly ministry.

Pope John XXIII, who reigned from 1958 to 1963, will be remembered above all for calling the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Council met in four plenary sessions from 1962 to 1965 and most of the world's then 2500 bishops attended it. Pope John wanted Vatican II to be a 'pastoral' council. It would not make new definitions of doctrine but pursue an *aggiornamento*, an updating or modernisation of the Church's style, discipline, thinking and *modus operandi* for the sake of connecting with and evangelising the modern world. He wanted the Council to bring about a spiritual renewal, a 'new Pentecost' to reinvigorate the Church's mission in the world and to focus Christians on all those in our society who have yet to hear effectively the Gospel of Christ. He also hoped the Council would help to bring about unity among Christians both of East and West.

Vatican II was unique in that its sixteen documents are still very much 'live' documents today. Unlike previous Councils, which adopted tightly defined conceptual frameworks, the texts of Vatican II are more discursive; like a river with many tributaries, they synthesise many traditions, strands, contributions and positions. Pope Paul VI, Blessed John XXIII's successor, wanted the documents to be approved by overwhelming majorities and so the final products express a consensus that cannot be proof-texted in the manner of biblical fundamentalists. As with reading the New Testament, individual sentences and paragraphs need to be read within the whole, and, importantly, in the light of their post-conciliar interpretation. Moreover, as Pope Benedict XVI observed, it is important not to see Vatican II as a rupture with the past but within the continuity of Catholic Tradition nor to split the 'spirit' of the Council from its 'letter'. In fact, the Council was unique in that it instituted a process within the Church that continues today. Its documents prompt dialogue and discussion, encourage deeper

understanding and promote ever-new applications. The Council's reception over the last fifty years as expressed in papal and episcopal magisterium, in the prudential judgments of the Roman curia, in the continuing discussion among theologians, as well as in the on-going study of the documents by the whole Church, is part of the process it instituted. We see this lived out in the present pontificate of Pope Francis.

Pope John Paul II, who reigned from 1978 to 2005, will surely one day attract the epithet 'The Great.' He has been a key player in the process of the reception of Vatican II and its teaching. He strove to implement the Council's vision as the Church entered the third millennium. On his many missionary journeys, he sought to announce the Gospel and teach the truth about God and about being human. He has left a large body of teaching that includes the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), fourteen encyclical letters on doctrine and morals, as well as his celebrated 'theology of the body' expounding the Church's teaching on the value of life, love and human sexuality. He is also remembered for his role in bringing down communism and his struggle against the Western 'culture of death.'

These popes were men full of energy. Central to their inner life was their deep faith and personal friendship with Christ. It was from Him they gained courage and tenacity. Who can forget the gentle humility of 'Good Pope John'? Who can forget 'Papa Wojtyla's' patient endurance of old age and sickness as he waved from his hospital bed? Very different personalities, one a diplomat and Church historian, the other a moral philosopher and university chaplain, each gave us a glimpse of the Master who "came not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20: 28). They showed us in our time the compassionate Heart of our Saviour.

To celebrate this occasion, I would like to announce two initiatives and to invite everyone in our Diocese of Portsmouth to participate.

First, I would like to invite everyone in the Diocese to select a short saying or passage from the writings and speeches of Pope John XXIII and/or Pope John Paul II and to tweet it to me (@BishopEgan) as well as to all your friends. It would be good to do this next Sunday, the day of the canonisation.

And secondly, I wish to ask every parish across the Diocese to offer a Mass on Sunday 11th May (Fourth Sunday of Easter) in thanksgiving for Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II. The intention would be to ask the prayers of the new saints for vocations to all states of life and ministry within our Diocese, but especially to the sacred priesthood. In that Mass, please also pray for all our seminarians presently in formation for the priesthood.

With my prayers and best wishes,

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

20th April 2014,
Easter Sunday