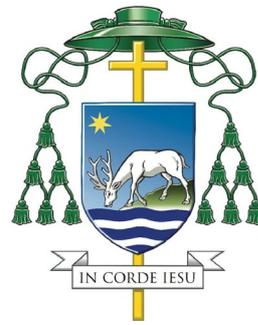


29th June 2020

Bishop Philip writes...



My dear People,

“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16: 18 ESV). These words of Jesus from the Gospel today, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, are thrilling. They reassure us that the Church is founded on Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, that as disciples of Christ, abiding in Him, we will be safe in the Truth, and that whatever perils the Barque of Peter might encounter in history, the Church's life and mission will endure on earth until the Lord returns at the End-Time.

Dear friends, these last months of coronavirus have been extraordinary and very distressing. Let us commend to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, all who have been ill and those who have generously cared for them, all who have died and their families, and all who have suffered - and will continue to suffer - financially or in whatever way because of the pandemic. We humbly ask God our Father to grant everyone a safe and effective recovery.

In His name, I want to thank every one of you in the Diocese of Portsmouth, and not least our clergy. Thank you for all you have been doing during this time to preserve and deepen your Catholic faith. Each day, our priests have continued to pray and to offer Holy Mass for their people. Each day, parish and school communities have sought to care for the poor and needy. Each day, our faithful, whilst having to endure a long and painful period of time without the salvific support of the Sacraments, have continued to offer prayer at home and to join live-streamed liturgies and devotions online. Each day, our chaplains have worked on the front-line, along with others caring for the dying. Many parishes, many priests and many people have been amazingly creative, keeping in touch with one another and with the most vulnerable by phone and by email.

It is now a great consolation that, within the requisite safeguards, our parish churches at last have begun to reopen and the public celebration of the Sacred Liturgy is to resume. We know, of course, that the danger has not passed. COVID will be with us for some time to

come. Let us implore from the Lord His continuing protection. Let us pray for a resolution of this pandemic. Let us ask Him for the discovery of an effective vaccine and for a secure recovery.

But I want to recall another line of Scripture, this time from St. Paul: "Now is the favourable time: this is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6: 2). These words surely speak to us. For now is a favourable time! This is the time to pray for the gift of hope. Hope is the anticipation that God is about to act in our lives to bring about something new. The Holy Spirit is at work, uniting us with Jesus and through Him with the Father, which is why Mother Church can look forward with renewed hope and trust.

The pandemic has been a huge challenge to our parishes, our schools, our Diocese. But we now need to move forward, to be reunited joyfully with the Lord in His Sacraments, to draw new life and energy from Him and to reopen, rebuild and rejuvenate our communities. To do this, we need to look beyond COVID and to resume our historic mission of Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church. As the Diocese of Portsmouth, this is our purpose. The pandemic has made many review their priorities in life, their values, their spirituality. We must not now become absorbed solely with internal repairs. We need to look beyond, to seek and to serve the needy, to reach out in love to those who wish to know more about the Gospel and the Catholic faith.

"Now is the favourable time: this is the day of salvation". So let's get going again – with these words before us over the weeks and months ahead! Let us enlist the help of St. Peter and St. Paul that we may deepen our own conversion to Christ and thus be equipped to go out on mission. Let us ask our inspiring patrons to pray for us: Mary Immaculate, St. Edmund of Abingdon and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. And let us continue ever to love and care for one another. With my prayers and best wishes – please pray for me too –

In Corde Iesu,

Philip, Bishop of Portsmouth

Solemnity of Ss Peter and Paul