

BE PROPHETS TO THE 21C!

I'm happy to offer this Mass today at this Alton Day of Renewal in its 40th year. The Charismatic Renewal has been for the Catholic Church a wonderful grace from God. Last weekend I went to Paisley to give a catechesis on 'The Church,' in which I said that what we believe about the Church is rightly contained in the Third Article of the Creed on the Holy Spirit. For it's the Holy Spirit Who creates and animates the Church. Jesus calls us personally to be His disciples, but the Holy Spirit enables us to respond to Him, uniting us with His Body. It's a great temptation for Catholics to become excessively ecclesio-centric: people focused on the Church of the Lord rather than the Lord of the Church, and thus static, narrow, parochial, concerned with structures. True, the Holy Spirit gives the Church hierarchical gifts, but He also bestows charismatic gifts and like a conductor in an orchestra, a pastor's role is to identify and release those gifts for mission. In this way, the Spirit constantly breathes new life into the Body, renewing the Church, giving her vitality, dynamism, growth and life.

Better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed said Caiaphas in the Gospel. We offer Mass today at a dramatic liturgical moment on the eve of Holy Week. Tomorrow is Palm Sunday when Jesus enters Jerusalem. He goes to Bethany on Monday, where, in a gesture associated with His burial, Mary anoints His feet with costly oil, thus provoking Judas. On Tuesday, Jesus is at supper, troubled that one of The Twelve will betray Him and another deny Him. On Spy Wednesday, Judas makes a deal to betray the Lord. And then on Thursday we enter the Triduum: the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the Celebration of the Passion on Good Friday, His descent into hell on Holy Saturday and the glory of the resurrection at the Easter Vigil. The Triduum in effect is one celebration, the Liturgy of the Passover, the Passing-Over of Jesus from death to life, from earth to heaven. By His Passing-over, He transforms human life and makes that transformation available to us, in and through the Church. I really urge you to do your best to attend all the liturgies of the coming week, to spend extra time each day in prayer, to study the readings from Mass, and if you've not done so already, to undergo the regeneration of a good Confession.

But let me return to the Gospel: *Better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed*. I don't know if you saw the documentary-movie *An Inconvenient Truth*? *An Inconvenient Truth* is a lecture from Al Gore on climate change and how our misuse of Nature is causing global warming and environmental disaster. This Truth is inconvenient because the only way to avoid a meltdown, is for all of us to change our life-styles, and time is running out. It was a prophetic film. A prophet is not someone who predicts the future but one who speaks the truth, however inconvenient, whether people want to hear it or not. Prophets are always controversial, even persecuted, like Jesus *a trustful lamb led to the slaughterhouse... 'Let us cut him off from the land of the living .. that his name be quickly forgotten'*. Jesus is the greatest Prophet of all because He is God the Son. He not only speaks the Truth, He *is* Truth, the Word through Whom all things were made. What He teaches in the doctrine of our Catholic faith, is true, even if inconvenient, even if people moan and groan, don't like it, try to block it out or reject it. This is why being Catholic today is often countercultural. We can often feel odd, an alien, an outsider.

So I end with a request: yes, to keep Holy Week special, to make a good confession and to attend the liturgies of the Triduum. But I also ask you to pray for the grace to be like Jesus, prophetic. The courage to do this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We need to be humble and holy, orthodox, creative and courageous. Our Diocese of Portsmouth is committed big-time to the work of new evangelisation: to fostering in all a personal-passionate friendship with Jesus, as a disciple in His Body the Church. But for this to happen, we need a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, both in ourselves that we may be filled with new ardour, and in others that they may be receptive to the Truth, however inconvenient. So we need to pray for courage. In this Mass, as Jesus lays down His life for us on this Altar, let us pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for prudence and wisdom, but above all for the courage to be prophetic at home, at work, at play.