



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 15th April 2018, the Third Sunday of Easter.

PEOPLE OF LIFE

My dear People of God, People of Life,

Happy Easter! Today, as you leave church, I have a small Easter Gift for you: a booklet of prayers and reflections that I hope you will like and treasure. More, by God's grace, I hope it will inspire you, your parish and all our Framework and Evangelisation Teams, to prayer, commitment and strategic action.

However, here I want to explore again what it means to be a human person, created by God, fallen through sin, yet redeemed in Christ. There is now in society great confusion and conflict about what it means to be human, about relationships, sexuality and love, but also, most seriously, about the actual value and dignity of human life itself from conception to natural death. As Catholics, the Gospel is always a sure guide. Jesus Christ is God, *Deum de Deo*, but as the Creed also affirms, the New Adam, from the earth the Perfect Human.¹ He is our Model. It is thrilling that we humans, body and soul, live at the intersection between the two realms of creation, the material and the spiritual! This should make us a people of life, a people of joy and good will, people who promote the sanctity of life in all its beautiful diversity.

Consider this. It's over fifty years since the 1967 Abortion Act, one of the most liberal in the world, came into effect.² Since then, ten million babies in the UK have been aborted, one in five pregnancies.³ As a people of life, our efforts to defend the unborn child, to care for pregnant mothers and to reverse or blunt this Act have had mixed results and it now looks as if, unjustly, our secularist government will no longer allow us even to pray outside hospitals and clinics. Consequently, I'm discussing with pro-life groups and with our Justice, Peace

and Social Responsibility Team some new forms of witness.⁴ We need to change tack. As a start, from this year on, I would like us to keep every 23rd October, the day the Act was passed, as a diocesan Day of Prayer and Reparation for Life. On that day, as we celebrate being people of life with various initiatives, I ask our priests to offer a *Mass for the Progress of Peoples*, but wearing the purple vestments of penitence.⁵

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the saintly Pope Paul VI's prophetic Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*.⁶ It restates the Church's doctrine on the integrity of sexual intercourse, reserved to a husband and wife in marriage, as an act of love open to life and that these two aspects, openness to life and love, must not be split or artificially separated⁷. Otherwise, the Pope warned, there would be catastrophic consequences for persons, families and society. Years on, we can now see exactly what he meant in broken family relationships, the reduction of sex to a casual activity, the trafficking of people for prostitution and pornography, the sexualisation of the young and the explosion of addictive behaviours leading to despair, shame and guilt⁸. I invite everyone to revisit this teaching and to reflect on the alternative 'spiritual ecology' that the Gospel proposes for family life, when natural methods of fertility and family planning are used.⁹ Our diocesan Marriage and Family Life Team are keen to help and to give advice.

As a people of life, who celebrate life as a Divine gift, full of meaning, purpose and value, we cannot idly stand by before evil, injustice, suffering and violence in our world, including the abuse of the Earth and its resources. We must act. Next month is the anniversary of Pope Francis's brilliant Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, in which he begs people to live an authentically human ecology, a more balanced, simple life-style, a life that respects the environment, helps end poverty and espouses justice.¹⁰ It would be good to re-read *Laudato Si* alongside *Humanae Vitae*. As Catholics, we should live an integrally 'green' and natural way of life. To do this, of course, given our fallen nature, we need the love of Christ and the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

Ours is an era of amazing advances in knowledge and technology, from science and medicine to the arts and humanities.¹¹ Yet the demise of faith and religion, the demise even of people praying, is rapidly undermining in Britain the foundations of ethics.¹² This dilution of our Christian patrimony threatens to usher in a frightening new Dark Age. No wonder a death-wish is arising for assisted suicide and euthanasia.¹³ As Catholics, as people of life, we cannot ignore these challenges. We must act. We must ask Jesus to help us reach out in love to those around, to assist people develop a personal relationship with God.¹⁴ This is fundamental to the mission of our schools and parishes. But more than this, we must enable the Catholic Tradition to engage positively and constructively with culture and society in a mutually enriching conversation. Indeed, in November this year, our Dialogue with Cultural Sectors Team is organising an exciting Symposium called "Science – or – Religion?" It will tackle positively some of the issues that current advances raise: What does it mean to be human? How can we be happy? What does the Gospel say about life? There will be more details soon in ENews.

"Peace be with you!" says the risen Jesus to His apostles in today's Gospel.¹⁵ Living a Christian life is demanding, but living life without Christ is intolerable. As we sang in the Easter *Exsultet*, He came to bring us life, joyful life, life to the full.¹⁶ Even if at times history seems ambiguous, His victory on Calvary guarantees that good will triumph. So I ask you now: Be people of life! Love Jesus; keep close to Him and adore Him in the Eucharist. Read the Gospels; study the Church's social teaching and be open to the questions people raise. This will help us to become positive, confident, 'can-do' Catholics. May Mary Immaculate, St. Edmund of Abingdon, and Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati inspire us and pray for us. May they help us share our Christian faith and Christian values, *Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church*.

Thank you for listening.

In Corde Iesu
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ See *Gaudium et Spes* 22

² As our near neighbour, Ireland, goes to the ballot next month, let us pray that the Irish people, true to their Christian patrimony, will stand up for the life of every human person from conception.

³ See D. Campbell 'Abortion rate in England and Wales hits five-year high' *The Guardian* (17th May 2016): available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/17/abortion-rate-england-and-wales-five-year-high> (April 2018). Currently, the BMA and others are actively campaigning to widen this to enable abortion on demand up to birth.

⁴ One such form of witness, now well-established, is the national March for Life, which this year is being held on 6th May. See: <http://www.marchforlife.co.uk/about-us/> (April 2018). Please consider joining this event as a witness to the life-giving values the Gospel promotes.

⁵ See *The Roman Missal. Third Typical Edition* (London, CTS: 2015) 1358-1359. It would be good to select from the readings offered: Genesis 1: 26 – 2: 3 with Psalm 8: 4-9 following, and John 15: 9-12. These Readings can be found in *Lectionary Volume III* 561-562 and 592 respectively.

⁶ 'Humanae Vitae' means 'On Human Life.' The Encyclical caused much controversy at the time: see Homily of Archbishop of Manila Angel Lagdameo, during the Mass to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, (July 9, 2008), available online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/life-and-family/humanae-vitae/humanae-vitae-controversial-but-prophetic> (April 2018).

⁷ For a concise summary of the Church's teaching, see *Catechism* 2331-2400

⁸ See Paul VI *Humanae Vitae* (London, CTS 1968) 19-30

⁹ You can download *Humanae Vitae* from http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html (April 2018). See also Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia* (Rome, Vatican Press: 2016) 80-85

¹⁰ See Pope Francis *Laudato Si. On Care of our Common Home* (London, CTS: 2015). See the Holy Father's remarks on abortion in *Laudato Si* 120.

¹¹ See the *Address at Episcopal Ordination* I gave on 24th September 2012: available online at <http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/bishop/pastoral-letters.php> (April 2018)

¹² The theme that Europe's loss of faith undermines ethics is characteristic of the thought, writing and teaching of Pope Benedict XVI. See Apostolic Journey of his Holiness Benedict XVI to München, Altötting and Regensburg (September 9-14, 2006): Meeting with the Representatives of Science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg (Tuesday, 12 September 2006). *Lecture of the Holy Father 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections'* available on-line at https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html (April 2018), Apostolic Journey to Germany 22-25 September 2011. Visit to the Bundestag. *Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI. Reichstag Building, Berlin Thursday, 22 September 2011* "The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law" available on-line at https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin.html (April 2018). See also his Address to Politicians, Diplomats, Academics and Business Leaders at Westminster Hall, City of Westminster 17th September 2010 in *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* (Stoke on Trent, Alive Publishing: 2010) 82-87. These themes are developed further by a number of thinkers. See for instance J. Carron *Disarming Beauty. Essays on Faith, Truth and Freedom* (University of Notre Dame: 2017).

¹³ The British Humanist Association has been campaigning for years on these themes: see Humanists UK ‘Guernsey to consider proposals for assisted dying’ (21st March 2018) available on line at: <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/03/21/guernsey-to-consider-proposals-for-assisted-dying/> (April 2018). They use the clever and deceptive euphemism of “assisted dying,” but do not be taken in by this: “assisted dying” means simply “assisted suicide.” The Guernsey vote is scheduled for 16th May. Please pray that love for life prevails.

¹⁴ The eighth *Solemn Intercession* from the Good Friday Liturgy is a splendid prayer we should say often: “Almighty ever-living God, who created all people to seek you always by desiring you and, by finding you, come to rest, grant, we pray, that, despite every harmful obstacle, all may recognize the signs of your fatherly love and the witness of the good works done by those who believe in you, and so in gladness confess you, the one true God and Father of our human race. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.” *The Roman Missal* 358

¹⁵ Luke 24: 36

¹⁶ It would make a wonderful prayer to reflect on to re-read the *Exultet* from the *Roman Missal*. For the text online, see: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm> (April 2018) and for a brief commentary by Fr. Michael Flynn, see: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/commentary-on-easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm> (April 2018)