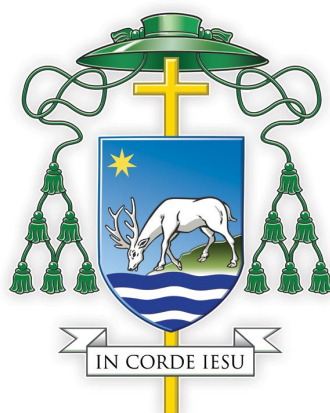




PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 27th September 2026, the Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Year

THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

Dear Friends of Christ,

Whenever we come to Sunday Mass, we profess our belief in the existence of a loving God, the Creator of heaven and earth, *visibilium omnium et invisibilium*: the Maker 'of all things visible and invisible.'¹ God's creation is magnificent! He made it out of nothing and He sustains it in being.² But as the Fourth Lateran Council affirmed, He made it two-fold, the visible creation and the invisible, with two orders of creatures, material and spiritual, humans being both.³ When we explore the visible world God has made, we cannot help being filled with awe and wonder. Yet this pales before the majestic invisible world of the angels and saints, gathered around God's throne, exclaiming *Sanctus! Sanctus! Sanctus!*⁴ The world of God's invisible creatures, the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim, is brought out admirably for us this coming week by the Church's liturgy, when on Tuesday we venerate the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael and on Friday our Guardian Angels.

Bear with me a moment. Angels are spiritual beings. They are immortal. They are personal, with intelligence and free will. Each, according to St. Thomas, is its own species.⁵ They are God's servants and messengers, although we also know from scripture - and we might add, from experience too - that some of them are fallen. Nowadays, living in a society with so many advances in science and technology, some find it hard to believe in angels, yet ironically cutting-edge science is open to the existence of invisible, immaterial worlds.⁶ Have you ever been in a room with an odd atmosphere? Or met a person struggling with an addiction? Or thought of a friend who then suddenly phones you? Many things in life are invisible. Even as you listen to this Letter, your church is filled with data links, mobile phone calls and other electronic signals, all invisible yet

real. Some processes have their origins in the spiritual realm. It is from there that God sends His angels to help, serve and protect us, just as in scripture, when we read of Michael bringing God's victory, Gabriel God's messages and Raphael God's healing.⁷ This is why each day we should thank God for His love, whilst entrusting ourselves to Him and asking His protection.

Why do I mention this? For two reasons. First, this time of the year has been named 'The Season of Creation.' The Season is an ecumenical period of prayer and action when we thank God for His creation, reflect on humanity's impact on the natural world and commit ourselves to sustainable living and environmental protection.⁸ This year, Pope Leo has urged us to turn off the noise of daily life in order to "hear the melodious voice of creation." It is not yet too late, he adds, to repair humanity's relationship with the environment.⁹ So, in the words of the *Mass for the Care of Creation*, let us ask the angels to help us care lovingly for creation and to live in harmony with all creatures.¹⁰

But secondly, this is also the time of the year when parishes take a Mass count and begin assembling their pastoral statistics. When I was a parish priest, I used to worry whether the figures were down! In the Diocese, for some communities, this will be the case, challenging them to renew their prayer, welcome and outreach. On the other hand, by God's grace, we have a mission-plan, *You Will be My Witnesses*, with an exciting ten-year vision¹¹. It is a plan for expansion, for strengthening and deepening faith. The Church exists to evangelise,¹² but like breathing-in and breathing-out, evangelisation is about ourselves growing in faith, as much as about reaching out to others.¹³ Whilst progress cannot be measured simply by numbers, numbers do say something. The visible does in some way point to the invisible. So are we growing in love for Jesus in His Word and in the Holy Eucharist? And are we going out to serve Him in the poor?¹⁴ How are we deepening our faith and putting it into action?

The hardest change of all is changing ourselves. How can I become more holy, closer to Christ? How can I become better formed in my faith? How can our parish put Christ more evidently at the centre? How can we pass on the Faith to the young? What works of charity, justice and ecology might we undertake? How can we encourage real stewardship, responsibility and tithing? And how can our parish witness to the Gospel in this area? If this parish closed tomorrow, would anyone who is not a member notice the difference?¹⁵

"Son, go and work in the vineyard today."¹⁶ In today's Gospel, Jesus uses the image of two sons, one who did the will of his father and one who did not. Which one are you? Over the next months, I want to encourage you to recommit yourself to keeping the Six Holy Habits:

- First, to keep Sunday special by attending Mass;¹⁷
- Secondly, to resolve to spend at least five minutes a day in prayer;¹⁸
- Thirdly to keep Friday as a day of penance and charity towards the poor;¹⁹
- Fourthly, regularly to pay a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament;²⁰
- Fifthly, to go to Confession once a month or so;²¹ and
- Sixthly, to join a small group for formation, prayer and fellowship.

Imagine the revolution if everyone in the Diocese adopted all six!

Finally, to make more visible what might otherwise be invisible, I invite you to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire. By sharing your experience, you will contribute to the development of the Diocese and help me to discern how the Lord is at work. It will only take a few minutes: you can access it by scanning the QR code below. Thank you in advance. We hope to repeat the survey in three years' time to view the journey made. Meanwhile, let me offer you the Lord's blessing. "May the Lord send His holy angels to keep you safe. May they guard you in all your ways. One day, may they bring you safely to heaven."²²

In Corde Iesu
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth.

TO ACCESS THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Open your smartphone's camera app, point it steadily at the code until a popup link appears, and then tap that link to open the content:



Or use this link: <https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/QTBWYRP>

¹ The Symbol or Profession of Faith in *The Roman Missal. English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition* (London, CTS: 2010) 562

² See Gen 1: 1, Job 12: 10, Ps. 104: 29-30, Acts 17: 28, Col 1: 15-17 and Heb 1: 3.

³ In H. Denzinger ed. P. Hünermann *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationem de rebus fidei et morum 43rd Edition* (San Francisco, Ignatius: 2012) – henceforth referred to as DH - DH 800, 3002.

⁴ Cf. Is 6: 3 and Rev 4: 8

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, CTS: 2016) – henceforth CCC – paragraphs 329-336 and St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, I q 50 a 4 "Whether the angels differ in species?"

⁶ Vincenzo Tamma, Professor of Physics and Quantum Technology at the University of Portsmouth, notes how "one can 'see' the *vestigia Trinitatis* ('traces of the Trinity' according to St. Augustine) within the fundamental quantum states of matter, the signature of God's creative act *ex nihilo* imprinting their ordering toward all the perfective forms existing in the cosmos, including our humanity created in the image and likeness of God. ... [The] lowest material order of creation already reflects in its quantum structure (and phenomena like entanglement) the Trinitarian relational ontology and points beyond itself towards the recognition of the traces of the same relational ontology in higher orders of reality, particularly within our humanity and in the overall spiritual world." See E. Pentin 'Quantum Physics and the Mystery of God's Creation' *Edward Pentin's Substack* (6th August 2026):

<https://edwardpentin.substack.com/p/quantum-physics-and-the-mystery-of> (September 2026)

⁷ See Rev 12: 7-9, Lk 1: 26-38 and Tobit 3: 17, 5: 4 *et passim*,

⁸ In 2015, Pope Francis instituted the first World Day of Prayer for Creation to be kept annually on 1st September, coinciding with the ecumenical Season of Creation that runs until 4th October, the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi.

⁹ Pope Leo XIV *Homily at Mass for the Care of Creation* (1 September 2026): www.vatican.va (September 2026)

¹⁰ *præsta, quæsumus, ut, dociles Spiritus tui spiraculo vitæ, opera manuum tuarum in caritate custodiamus* (collecta) and *novos cælos et terram novam exspectantes, convenienter una cum omnibus creaturis vivere discamus* (post communionem) ‘docile to the life-giving breath of the Spirit, we may lovingly care for the work of your hands’ and ‘as we await the new heavens and the new earth, we may learn to live in harmony with all creatures’ Dicastery Promoting Integral Human Development ‘Presentation of the *Missa pro custodia creationis*’ 3rd July 2025:

www.humandevlopment.va/en/news/2025 (September 2026)

¹¹ Diocese of Portsmouth (2022): *You will be My Witnesses. Ten-Year Mission Plan for the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth*. www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk (September 2026).

¹² Pope St. Paul VI (1975) *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 14 in DH 4573.

¹³ As Pope St. Paul VI put it: “The Church is an evangeliser, but she begins by being evangelised herself (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 15) DH 4574

¹⁴ We see this in the life of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and many of the saints. Thus, St. Pier Giorgio Frassati once said: “Jesus pays me a visit in Holy Communion every morning, and I repay him in the miserable way I can by visiting Him in His poor.” See C Siccardi *Pier Giorgio Frassati – A Hero for our Times* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 2016), 153.

¹⁵ J. Mallon *Divine Renovation Beyond the Parish* (Frederick Me, The Word Among Us Press: 2020) 35. Each pastoral area has been given a rich resource from Caritas Diocese of Portsmouth setting out the needs of the local communities and about how they might reach out in a tangible way to those in need in their own localities. Have you taken this up or put yourself forward to be a Caritas Champion for your parish?

¹⁶ Mt 21: 28

¹⁷ See CCC 1324.

¹⁸ “Let me ask you: Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord’s heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy” Pope Francis *Gaudete et Exultate* (London, CTS: 2018) 151

¹⁹ See ‘Re-establishing Friday Penance:’ <https://rcdow.org.uk/news/re-establishing-friday-penance/> (September 2026)

²⁰ See CDW *Redemptionis Sacramentum* [London, CTS: 2004] 135

²¹ Regular confession is good even if we end up confessing the same sins. “It is true. Our sins are always the same, but we clean our homes, our rooms, at least once a week, even if the dirt is always the same; in order to live in cleanliness, in order to start again. Otherwise, the dirt might not be seen but it builds up. Something similar can be said about the soul, for me myself: If I never go to confession, my soul is neglected and in the end I am always pleased with myself and no longer understand that I must always work hard to improve, that I must make progress. And this cleansing of the soul which Jesus gives us in the sacrament of confession helps us to make our consciences more alert, more open, and hence, it also helps us to mature spiritually and as human persons” Pope Benedict XVI *Catechetical Meeting of the Holy Father with Children who had received their First Communion during the Year* 15th October 2005:

www.vatican.va (September 2026)

²² Based on Psalm 91: 11-12