

Reflection – 17 July 2022

Eddie Hopkins

I want to begin with some words of thanks before getting to the reflection. Firstly, to Canon David for his kindness and patience towards me during my time here. Running the cathedral is no easy task, but as I reflect on the year, I realise how much I've learnt from him. I'd also like to thank Louise, Mike and Jenny for being such a pleasure to work alongside every day. It would be difficult to imagine three more dedicated people. Jerome, our resident school chaplain, has also been a pleasure to share the house with. Last, but not least, thank you to all of you in the parish. Your kindness and prayers have been a great support to me during my time here, and I am extremely grateful. I hope to see many of you before I leave, but rest assured that I will be back at the Cathedral from time to time.

So, before I become sentimental, on we go to the actual reflection.

It is surprising how quickly ten months can pass. In some respects, it feels like just yesterday that I arrived in Arundel and slightly strange to be leaving already. However, change is part of life for seminarians: even in normal times a seminary community changes from year to year as some people leave and new people arrive. It's probably quite a good preparation for priesthood, because bishops can, and do, ask priests to leave a parish and go somewhere else because that's where he needs them. It's a good thing that priests promise obedience to their bishop not once but twice: first on being ordained a deacon and again on being ordained a priest.

Obedience to the bishop is a particular feature of life as a priest, deacon or seminarian. We give this obedience so that we can better serve Christ and his Church. We are placing our trust not only in our human bishop, but also in the Holy Spirit who guides him as he does the whole Church. Now, you might be reading this with a sense of relief that the bishop won't be asking you to up sticks and move towns to serve the Church. Don't get too comfortable though. If you live the gospel and pay attention to Holy Spirit, changes will also come in your own life.

Indeed, we are living in a time of change. Already, 2022 has seen war in Ukraine, big rises in the cost of living, and soon a new prime minister. Who could have foreseen all these things back in January? Life is also changing for the Church in West Sussex, not least because the number of priests is falling every year. You could be forgiven for feeling depressed by things, but God calls us to be a people of hope. The Holy Spirit remains with us in hard times. Church history is awash with persecutions, wars and bitter internal disputes, but in each age we find saints who bring the Church back to its mission: Benedict, Francis and Clare of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, John Henry Newman, St Bernadette. There is a glorious throng who have gone before us.

Our job is also to become saints. Probably not famous, canonised saints, but people who reach the goal we all want to reach. People who reach heaven. That's not just for priests and seminarians, it's for everyone. The way to do this is simple, but not always easy. We need to love God and love our neighbour. We all know what loving our neighbour looks like

if we stop to think about it. Loving God is less obvious perhaps, but easily put. Receive the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist, and pray every day. Whether you say the Rosary, the Jesus Prayer, meditate on the Bible or pray in another manner, is less important than the fact that you pray every day. I have in my own life experienced the truth of St James' words, "Draw close to God and he will draw close to you." (James 4:8)

Strive to become a saint and live with hope in Christ.

May God bless you all.

Eddie