

Two months today, on Sunday 13th September, our deanery Eucharistic Congress will culminate with a Mass in the Corn Exchange in the centre of town, with talks given by visiting keynote speakers, and with a Eucharistic procession through the streets of Ipswich. Preparatory meetings have been held regularly over the last several months, and a few weeks ago Fr Luke and I walked the route of the procession through our streets as part of the planning for the big day. Our Bishop, +Peter Collins, will say the Mass on that day, assisted by Bishop Alan Hopes, the retired Bishop of East Anglia, along with several of the local priests. Throughout that week there will be talks and sermons, various events in our Catholic schools, St Alban's, St Pancras', St Mark's, and St Mary's, times of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, ample opportunity to go to Confession, and many other events besides. In our own church there will be Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day on the Thursday of that week, and there will be a watching list put up soon for people to sign up to take their place before our Eucharistic Lord.

But what's it all for? What is a Eucharistic Congress and why are we having one?

First, our Eucharistic Congress is part of a diocesan-wide celebration of the founding of the Diocese of East Anglia fifty years ago in 1976 which, if memory serves, also saw a hot summer!

But what is a Eucharistic Congress? A Eucharistic Congress is a gathering of Catholics, clergy and lay people, who come together to celebrate and glorify the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, to learn more about Our Lord's Eucharistic presence, to deepen their faith in, and their devotion to, His presence in the Blessed Sacrament, and to find ways to spread this devotion – and Our Lord's love –

farther afield, in a world that is so desperately in need of Our Lord's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

In short, as it says on the front of our newsletter, the aim of the Eucharistic Congress is to deepen our belief in, and our devotion to, the real presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and through this deeper devotion to foster a renewed spirit of faith and fervour across the parishes of our deanery in this golden jubilee year of our diocese.

Eucharistic Congresses are a surprisingly modern invention. The first one ever was held in Lille, in France, in the year 1881. The idea soon caught on, and there were Congresses in other French towns in the years that followed. Although to begin with the Congresses were very local, as is ours this year, they soon became international in flavour with people coming from far and wide, and with the Pope often sending a Cardinal as his delegate to oversee the proceedings and the ceremonies. In 1908, the first International Eucharistic Congress to be held in an English-speaking country was held in London under the auspices of Cardinal Bourne.

Some of you will have seen that in this 250th year of American Independence there has been a huge Eucharistic Congress, spread across the United States, and incorporating numerous Eucharistic processions in many of the major cities and towns across the country with thousands of people joining in and worshipping the Lord our God truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.

More detailed plans for the actual events of our Congress will be made known over the next couple of weeks or so, with the focus being on our schools at the start of the week, with Adoration all day here on the Thursday, with a service of Adoration and healing at St Mark's on Friday, and with the culmination coming on Sunday, 13th September, when

individual parishes will adjust their Mass schedules so that as many people as possible can get to the *grande finale*, as it were, in the centre of town on the last day.

In the meantime, please do pray that our Congress may be a success. In this case, success will be measured, in part, by the number of people involved but, much more importantly, by an increase of faith and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in the hearts and minds of faithful Catholics, both during the week itself and in the time that follows. Will Ipswich – a town that has been continuously inhabited since Anglo-Saxon times, and which continues to flourish, a town that was home to the Mediæval shrine of Our Lady and which is home to her shrine once more – will Ipswich flourish once more as a town of faith and devotion, where a love of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother will burn again in the hearts of its inhabitants?

Take one of these prayer cards, and make this prayer part of your devotions over the next couple of months in the build-up to our Eucharistic Congress in September. Pray before the Blessed Sacrament over the course of the summer, go to Confession regularly and frequently as part of your preparation for the Congress, mark off the days in your diary to ensure you can get to the various events, and book your ticket for the events on that final Sunday. The tickets are free, but we need to know numbers so that we can plan effectively, so do book your ticket by going to the website address on the newsletter. And may God pour down abundant blessings upon us all.