

At this time of election fever I hereby announce on this All Saints Sunday the results of the York Diocesan poll.

Voting has taken place over a very long period, at least a millennium, 365,000 election days.

Almost as long as Brexit!

Each parish church has chosen its patron saint.

Last Monday I went through the York diocesan directory and totted up the votes. I disqualified the substantial number of parishes who'd voted for All Saints who effectively had put their cross against every candidate, binge believers opting for every single item on the menu.

Similarly Holy Trinity, Emmanuel, Christ Church etc were ruled out, because you are supposed to vote for people not doctrines.

I selected the top twelve for my cabinet of saints, with the number twelve having a divine precedent.

Top of the poll by a very big margin was Mary with 76 churches dedicated to her. A big presence, nearly one in three of Yorkshire's churches. Mary, the Mother of our Lord, who stood by him even when he was off with her. 'What have I do with you, woman, my hour is not yet come,' Jesus snaps at Cana when his mum is trying to twist his arm when the wedding has run dry. 'Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does my will is my mother, my brother.' Jesus dismissively declares. I wonder

what dear Mary thought when she heard that. Yet she didn't go off in a huff but stayed right through to the end. At the foot of the cross stood Mary, a sword piercing her soul. Mary brings mothering to tenderise the heart of God. Don't go all Protestant on me. Every third church you drive past, thank God for Mary and all mothers. 'Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.'

Jesus' second in command Peter, actually comes in second, a poor second, 31 votes to Mary's 76. As I said last Sunday, every vicar should appoint a thug as his right hand man. Jesus appointed Peter, a burley fisherman, who got it so right and got it so wrong. 'You're the Messiah, Lord.' 'Lord, they mustn't do that to you. I'll kill them first.' 'I tell you I never knew the man of whom you speak.' And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, 'This very night before the cock crows you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly. 'Peter, do you love me?' Jesus asks three times at that Easter fish breakfast on Galilee's shore. 'Then feed my sheep.' Peter, personifying all our bluster, all our good intentions, all our faithlessness. Yet Christ believed in him and believes in us, calling, recalling and further recalling manifold.

Equal third comes John the Gospel writer, at 23 votes scoring more than all the other three Gospel writers put together – Mark has just 7 churches, Matthew and Luke 5 each. In John's Gospel God in Christ makes it personal, the Word becomes flesh and even weeps. Clearly that was a clear winner with our ancestors.

Michael, chief of the angels also gets 23 votes. Most saints seem barely human, but Michael isn't human at all. Yet I've never visited a church which doesn't contain numerous angels skulking in wood carvings and peeping through windows, picturing God watching us, carrying us throughout the good times and the bad. It's good to have their leader represented in my cabinet, even if he's from the House of Lords rather than Commons.

Fifth comes Andrew with 21 votes, the fishermen who brought his brother Peter and the whole of Scotland to Jesus, signalling our job is to bring people to Jesus too.

Nicholas, patron saint of seafarers and lost maidens is sixth with 20 churches, mostly on the Humber and Yorkshire coast, their tall spires helping sailors navigate home. Any church exists to bring people home, the only institution which deals in the making points and breaking points of life.

In seventh place with 16 churches, mostly in the north of the diocese is Hilda, who founded this church. Hilda was a Northumbrian princess, baptised with her uncle, King Edwin at a newly erected York Minster by Paulinus, York's first archbishop in AD 627. She gave up all privilege for the Religious life, founding Whitby Abbey and presiding over the Synod of Whitby in 664. She was a Brexit lass, and along with Bishop Colman wanted the Church up North to stay Celtic. But smooth St Wilfrid of Ripon won the day, describing us Britons as stupid not to go along with Europe and the Roman Church. Hilda is

recalled by Bede as a supremely graceful and impartial president, not taking her bat and ball home when the vote went against her, but staying as only Christ stays.

John the Baptist keeps her company in 7th place, the man who gave God his undistracted priority down to his very diet, dress code and place of residence, eating wild locusts, wearing a coat of camel's hair and living in the wilderness, and paving the way for Christ. As we are called to be fierce in giving God priority and letting Christ shine through.

At ninth place comes Helen, 13 churches clustered mostly around York. She was the mother of Constantine, a complex guy who was proclaimed Emperor at York. She was a deeply devout Christian who led numerous pilgrimages to the Holy Land in search of the true cross, the cross ever in her heart. Constantine was converted when the sun's rays dazzled him and happened to make the sign of the cross, and his mum's faith became his and the faith of a whole empire.

Cuthbert is tenth with 12 churches, mostly in the north of the diocese, a fierce Christian who for years was a hermit confining himself to a shallow pit on Inner Farne Island, refusing to see anyone, focussing just on God and the sky. Odd characteristics which strangely qualified him to be bishop of Hexham and then Lindisfarne.

Finally in equal 11th place, with 11 churches each come Oswald and Laurence. One Easter as he was feasting in his seaside castle at Bamborough, overlooking Holy Island and

Cuthbert's shallow pit, King Oswald noticed a huge crowd of the poorest of the poor outside the castle begging. Oswald immediately took the feast from his table and shared it with the beggars. When they had gobbled every morsel, he broke the silver dishes up and distributed the pieces amongst them.

Laurence is a bit of surprise - no local links as with Oswald since he was a deacon in Rome in the Third Century. But like Oswald, he used his treasures to feed the poor. Actually they weren't his treasures but the church's. When the greedy Roman Governor realised that there were no church assets for him to strip had Laurence roasted on a grid iron. Laurence's final words - other than aagh! - were 'These are the treasures of the Church.' Living out the words of his Saviour, Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

York's top twelve, with sadly no modern saints. So over to you this All Saintside to fill the gap. Since we are surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, towering over every village and town, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.