I wonder if some of you have ever been to Cornwall across the river from Plymouth and Devonport. I used to live in St Budeaux, which is on the Devon side of the River Taymar, and I had an aunt who took me every day for walks along the river bank. It was great fun for a little boy to be able to take some stones from the beach and skim them over the water and watch them bouncing along until they sank. I think children still play this game, probably at seasides and riversides.

I want to tell you something about this part of the world which may be very helpful. The River Taymar separates Devon from Cornwall. In a way, they belong to each other as brother and sister. The elder one is Cornwall, which goes back to very ancient times when the Celts who lived there built their homes and their churches. They in fact colonised Devon in the very earliest days. Devon is, of course, famous for many of the great sailors. You can think of Drake and Raleigh to mention a couple. Both these men were very religious and they were very aware of God’s help in all they did. When you think of Drake navigating the globe, in a vessel powered by the wind, that took some doing! Drake is reputed to have said, “There are many times when I have almost given up, but somehow I was helped to get up and go for it!”

On a different tack, because the River Taymar divided Devon from Cornwall, when the day came that the railways began to spring up, and the great engineer of the railways wanted to be able to run his trains from London to where I lived in Devon, he needed to cross the River Taymar, which was not easy in those days. I am thinking of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. He decided the river was not going to stop him from getting his railway into Cornwall, so he designed the famous bridge which you can see there today – a double span iron bridge, which carried his railway from one side to the other. As a little boy, I used to play under that bridge and watch the funny little trains in those days which went across it. They were really like two or three carriages with an engine built in, which either went straight over the bridge or reversed and brought the train back. Now, here is the story of the bulding of the bridge: Brunel came with all his engineers and workmen and they built piers in the middle of the river, and then over the top of them he designed a twin pair of ironwork spans. These would carry the trains right across from St Budeaux to the other side of the river in Cornwall.

The engineers who came to see all the work being done shook their heads and said, “He’ll never do it! It’s too big a project. He’ll have to design something else.” However, Brunel was not going to be put down by a few other engineers, but rather was driven on to do what he had started. They all thought he was mad and assumed he would never finish the job. However, Brunel said to his engineering friends, “If you give me the lifting force, I can do anything!” The lifting force was the ability to lift these twin spans up and up and up until they were resting on the piers. He used pumps driven by water power to lift the twin spans on to the piers. So he got his railway across the river and into Cornwall. Now the important thing is what he said to his friends – “If you give me the lifting force, I can do anything.”

That was a huge statement of belief. And what he was really saying was, if you are given the power to do something, even though you can’t do it yourself, when you try to do it, you will do it, because you can use a lifting force which God gives. The Church calls the lifting force the Holy Spirit and God gives each of us some of the lifting force to do things we find very hard or even impossible. But we have to use the lifting force sensibly. A Christian person can say quite firmly, “If God gives me the lifting force, I can do whatever He wants me to do.” So when you come to confirmation, you are coming to receive from God a little bit of his lifting force, His Holy Spirit, to help you do all the things God wants you to do. For example, if you feel you are called to be a nurse but the whole thing seems rather frightning, remember that when God calls you He will give the power to do it; He will give you the lifting force and you will do your job marvellously.