

**60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Diocese of Paisley  
Pastoral Congress**

**St. Mirin's Cathedral, Paisley  
8<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

**Address by the Right Rev. Philip Tartaglia  
Bishop of Paisley**

I welcome you all most warmly to this Pastoral Congress in the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the foundation of the Diocese of Paisley, and in preparation for the visit to the diocese later this year of the Apostolic Nuncio in this country as the representative of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI.

We are gathered here in St. Mirin's Cathedral for Solemn Evening Prayer in Pastoral Congress as an assembly which comprises priests, religious and lay faithful from all the parishes of the Diocese of Paisley. I was particularly keen to have representation from diocesan bodies, from parish pastoral councils and from the free associations of the faithful which have a spiritual, pastoral, apostolic or charitable purpose. To all of you, welcome and greetings in the Lord!

**“You are together Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it.”**

I wanted to gather you here this evening first of all to encourage us all in our common work for Christ and for the Church. “Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it,” St. Paul said to us today. So this evening I want to recognise and celebrate the unity-in-diversity of this local Church of Paisley, made up of parishes in different places, and of movements and groups of all kinds under the pastoral

authority and leadership of the bishop and of the priests of the diocese.

I am happy to record that I do not sense that the bishop needs a heavy hand or a tight grip to hold us all together. I do not sense forces pulling in different directions in this diocese. I do not sense great dangers to the unity of faith or to the cohesiveness of pastoral action. I sense a fundamental unity of all in the Holy Spirit. I sense a shared commitment to do God's work.

So I want to encourage you in your prayer, in your apostolic endeavour, and in your pastoral activity. I want you to know that the Diocese is grateful to God for everything you bring to our unity in Christ. I want you to know that the Diocese fully supports your charism and your service. I invite you to continue to offer these gifts to your local parish so that the whole community can be strengthened by your insight, by your generosity of spirit, by your prayer and by your readiness to serve and to give witness.

Evangelisation is the great work and the great challenge of the Church in the present moment, and I invite you to concentrate your efforts on the new evangelisation of our parish communities and of our diocese.

### **The Mass and the Sacraments**

I have been visiting parishes for the celebration of Confirmation and First Holy Communion. At these liturgies, having spoken to the children about what they are about to receive, I then say a few words to their parents and sponsors, and to the assembly gathered there. I explain that the children still need to be supported in their faith and Catholic practice, and I exhort them to give them good example. In particular, I encourage them to bring the children to Mass and to the sacraments, for the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The

Mass is the source, the centre and the goal of evangelisation. We cannot be a holy people if we do not go to Mass. We cannot do God's will and serve his purposes if we do not go to Mass.

I know I do not need to convince you of this, but neither can we be complacent about the situation. And it is important that we recognise that our prayer and pastoral activity are not just for our own sanctification and for our own good, but for the sanctification and good of all our brothers and sisters. And their good and sanctification is intimately connected to the Mass and to the Sacraments because there the crucified and risen Christ is present and active in the most wonderful and efficacious way.

I said a few moments ago that I did not feel that the diocese is threatened by great problems of faith and doctrine. At the same time, we dare not be complacent. Secularisation, the loss of faith, a lack of knowledge about the faith, is a symptom of our time. It is a very dangerous phenomenon for the life of the Church. We ignore it at our peril. It has been widely recognised that the new evangelisation is every bit a re-evangelisation of Catholic communities who received the faith long ago and who now need spiritual renewal. In those circumstances, we need the Mass and the celebration of Sunday more than ever to sustain us, nourish us and hold us together in our Catholic faith and practice.

Nor should it be forgotten that the celebration of the Eucharist calls for a regular practice of the Sacrament of Penance as personal preparation for the devout celebration of the Eucharist.

So I encourage you to be faithful to Mass and the sacraments for the good of your own spiritual life, for the good of your spiritual or pastoral or apostolic service, and for the good of your parish and of the diocesan Church. Evangelisation centred on the Mass and the Sacraments corresponds to the deepest instincts of the Catholic mind and heart, and is completely central to the mystery of the Church taught by the Second Vatican Council.

I invite your associations and groups to join with the priests of the diocese in our common task of putting the Eucharist and the Mass at the centre of Catholic life, and in working to attract and welcome people in our parishes to Mass and the Sacraments. I ask you to cooperate with your parish priest and parish pastoral councils to find creative and innovative ways to build up parishes which are true communities in which people can find encouragement and support for their Catholic life and practice,

### **The Word of God**

I cannot speak about evangelisation without speaking about the Word of God. There is no Evangelisation without the Word of God. We cannot be a holy people without the Word of God. We cannot do God's will or serve his purposes without God's Word. Evangelisation begins with the proclamation and hearing of the Word of God. Evangelisation is accompanied by the Word of God. Evangelisation is the embedding of the Word of God in our lives. Evangelisation is the fruit of the Word of God.

It is perhaps providential that not long after the Apostolic Nuncio comes to visit our diocese, a Synod of Bishops will take place in Rome on the subject of the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. It will be a companion to the last Synod on the Eucharist in the Life and Mission of the Church. From these two Synods, I am sure, there will be generated a sharper vision of the new evangelisation of the Church and of the world based on the Word of God and the Eucharist, itself an image of the Mass with its one table of Word and Sacrament.

In my personal submission to the Synod Secretariat, among the points I made were these:

- A great gift of Vatican II was to make the Scriptures more available than ever to the Church and many more people read the Bible than before.
- The primary point of contact with the Sacred Scriptures for the vast majority of Catholics is the liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Eucharist.
- Everyone is convinced that the Word of God is utterly central to the renewal of faith and to the life of the Church.
- There are signs that *Lectio Divina*, the spiritual reading of the Scriptures, is a rather effective method of reading and praying the Scriptures.

I think we need to work hard in our parishes to make the Liturgy of the Word as effective as possible especially at the Sunday Eucharist, and I encourage priests, readers, and parish liturgy groups and musicians to do all they can to make that happen in conformity with the liturgical directives.

I also encourage parish groups, prayer groups, apostolic groups to read and pray the Scriptures as often as possible, and I suggest that you use the method of *Lectio Divina*, which, in my experience, is an uplifting combination of prayer, teaching and shared experience in the Holy Spirit.

I ask you to look at the spirituality of your own groups and association and see if it can be made richer, deeper and stronger by an explicit, regular and prolonged contact with the Sacred Scriptures, either by a form of *lectio divina* or in another way suitable to the individual spirituality and characteristics of your group or association.

## **Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life**

Since I came to the Diocese of Paisley as bishop, I have encouraged you, as an extension of the Mass, to dedicate an hour a week of Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament for vocations for the priesthood and religious life.

To have enough priests especially, but also to generate vocations to religious life, is a major need for the present and future of this diocese. For me it is axiomatic that we absolutely must have enough priests to serve our communities. But I was wondering if you would tire of this message or suspect that we are praying only out of desperation, as if it was all that we could do.

But I was heartened by Pope Benedict XVI's words on this subject when he visited the United States of America last month. The Pope said to no less a gathering than the entire Bishops' Conference of the United States in response to a question about the decline in vocations that we should not forget that when it comes to vocations, prayer is the *one thing necessary*. His actual words were:

*“In the Gospel, Jesus tells us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers. He even admits that the workers are few in comparison with the abundance of the harvest (cf. Mt 9:37-38). Strange to say, I often think that prayer – the unum necessarium – is the one aspect of vocations work which we tend to forget or to undervalue!”*

And he prefaced that observation with a most challenging insight. He said,

*“Let us be quite frank: the ability to cultivate vocations to the priesthood and the religious life is a sure sign of the health of a local Church. There is no room for complacency in this regard. God continues to call young people; it is up to all of us*

*to encourage a generous and free response to that call. On the other hand, none of us can take this grace for granted. ”*

In view of the wisdom and strength of these remarks of the Holy Father's, I feel that it remains the right thing for me to continue to set vocations to the priesthood and religious life as a major priority of this diocese, and I continue to ask you to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. And I invite your groups and associations to play a full part in that prayer for vocations in our diocese.

I feel too that such an emphasis on prayer for vocations to a consecrated state of life will not diminish the vocation to marriage or to the lay state more generally. I am confident that prayer for vocations will bring into a sharper focus the fact that, as Vatican II taught, everyone has a vocation in the Church both to holiness and to their state of life, and especially to married life. So I am confident that prayer for vocations will serve all vocations.

Prayer for vocations of course is closely linked to pastoral care of young people. For many reasons, the transmission of faith and Catholic life to the up-coming generations appears to be a qualitatively more difficult task for priests, parents and teachers now than it was at any time in living memory. Nonetheless, the response of many young Catholics to Christ and Church is admirable and gives reason for hope.

The Diocese of Paisley is committed to the pastoral care of young people through and in conjunction with their families in the first place, and also with Catholic primary and secondary schools, through our Youth to Lourdes project and through various initiatives for the religious formation of young people. Together with other priests and youth leaders I will be accompanying a diocesan delegation of young adults to Sydney in July for the World Youth Day, the highlight of which will be Mass with the Holy Father.

Please pray for our young people. Please pray for their parents and other adult Catholics that we are able to pass on and transmit our faith to them in a way that is compelling for their lives and which helps them to recognise and live out their vocation to follow Christ within his Church.

The involvement of young people in the life of the Church is a challenge in today's world. I invite your groups and associations to review its membership and ask if you can take steps to encourage young or at least younger people to share in the spirituality and activity proper to your association.

### **The Church and the world – the vocation of the lay faithful**

The wisdom of the Second Vatican Council on the lay faithful can possibly be distilled into this key idea: the specific characteristic of the identity and mission of the lay faithful is its secular character. This secular character qualifies the mission of the lay faithful to sanctify the world and all temporal things by their presence and activity in the home, in the school, in the workplace, in public life and in all sectors of human activity. The mystery of Christ is not a gift we keep for ourselves. It is our duty to transform the world and the lives of men and women with the love of God, and this is a duty which belongs to the whole Church but which is entrusted in a special and irreducible way to the lay faithful, consecrated as they are by the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

I want to encourage you, and through you, all the lay faithful of the diocese to carry out that mission of yours both on your own initiative and along with the Catholic associations and apostolic and spiritual activities that are here represented. The commitment of all Catholics is so necessary to defend and advance the mission of the Church in the world today. The commitment of all Catholics is so necessary to give witness to

the presence and activity of God's rule and Kingdom in the world. The response of the Church to the challenge of secularisation depends in large measure on how Catholic lay people are formed and on how they live their faith in the world.

A huge priority of the local Church must be to form its Catholic laity and to encourage them to play their full part in the Church's mission. The Diocese of Paisley is taking steps to address this task not least by its programme of continuing religious formation for Catholic teachers and by other initiatives at diocesan and parish level. These programmes need to be a constant feature of diocesan life.

I ask each of the groups here represented to ask if they take steps not just to carry out their specific activities but if they have a systematic programme for formation of their members in Catholic faith, social doctrine, liturgy and spirituality.

In these days, I and others have been involved in trying to raise awareness of the moral issues around the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill to come before the House of Commons next week.

At other times, other issues of life, human sexuality, marriage and the family, social justice, poverty, disarmament, and the environment are to the fore. These serious and delicate ethical, moral and social matters are not just important to the Church, but are vital to determining the kind of civilisation we want for the present and for the future. The response of the lay faithful to these profound questions will ultimately determine the outcome of these important issues. That is why formation of the lay faithful is critical in the Church of today and of tomorrow. This remains a huge challenge for all of us.

## **Christian Unity**

The search for Christian Unity remains a key part of the life of the Catholic Church. In this search for Christian Unity, witness of faith and life is recognised to be most telling factor. As organised Catholic groups and associations, you are well placed to add by prayer and action your contribution to the unity of Christians. For that reason, I ask you to review your activities and assess whether there is an appropriate ecumenical aspect to your group's activities and whether that can be suitably strengthened. The seemingly modest act of humbly and lovingly laying open your faith and activity to other Christians can be a most effective and helpful witness on the journey of Christian unity.

## **Conclusion**

These are some of the priorities, challenges and opportunities which present themselves in the present moment to this diocese and to the Catholic Church more generally. I offer them to you for prayer and for action.

I have not singled out groups or associations in my address this evening. I want you to know that I and the priests of the diocese thank God for blessing this diocese with your faith, prayer and commitment. We value your spiritual, apostolic, pastoral and charitable gifts and activity as our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we encourage you to fulfil your God-given mission in the Church so that God's kingdom may come.

I am pleased to say, finally, that one of the great blessings of this diocese is a dedicated, responsible and cohesive presbyterate for whom I daily give thanks to God. Please continue to support and pray for your priests.

I invoke the maternal intercession of Mary the Mother of the Lord and I implore the prayers of all the Saints on the priests, religious and lay faithful of the Diocese of Paisley. Please pray for me. May God bless us all.

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