

## *Homily for Vespers 9<sup>th</sup> April 2011*

We are all familiar with Glasgow's motto: *Let Glasgow Flourish*. Perhaps not everyone is aware that this is part of a longer verse and to complete it we need to add some further words: *Let Glasgow Flourish by the Preaching of the Word and the Praising of His Name*.

This motto has relevance to Glasgow's foundation as a Christian settlement in the late sixth century by a missionary Bishop called Kentigern, better known to us as St Mungo.

The word he preached was of course the Word of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ and His sublime teaching. This teaching has been a major influence in the development of our Western civilisation, and is still adhered to by millions of people worldwide.

Three major events in the history of the Christian Church in this area reflected important political and social changes; the first was the reinvigoration of the Bishopric of Strathclyde under Earl David, later

King David I of Scotland [in the 12<sup>th</sup> century]. The prosperity of the Church grew and we still have today a magnificent mediaeval cathedral which remained the seat of the Archbishop of Glasgow until the next major change occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with the Reformation, resulting in the last mediaeval Catholic Bishop dying in Paris as a refugee in 1603.

The third event was the 19<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution, as a result of which Glasgow became a magnet for immigrants both from within Scotland and from across the Irish Sea. The Catholic Church grew again in Glasgow leading as we have seen to the building of this Chapel by the Clyde which became in 1878 the new seat of the restored Archbishopric.

These three major historical events mark both continuities and discontinuities, and it seems entirely appropriate that the Archdiocese of Glasgow should take as its motto, the continuation of: *Let Glasgow Flourish* which we see on its coat of arms and on the face of the lectern from which the Gospel is proclaimed. *Floreat Verbi Praeconio* means

literally in English, *Let it (i.e. Glasgow) Flourish by the Proclamation of the Word.*

In the prologue of the fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to St John, we read: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us"*. The four Gospels have come down to us in Greek, and this description of Christ as the incarnate Word of God, in other words the Word of God made visible in the person of Jesus Christ borrows, not only the Greek language, but also Greek thought. We were tempted to inscribe some Greek on the lectern but thought that perhaps the Latin itself is challenging enough!

The readings and prayers that we have this evening at Vespers and will have tomorrow are those which are set for this Sunday, the fifth in Lent; just two weeks before Easter. By happy chance or providence we have a Reading from one of the early Church Fathers who was a great defender of the true nature of Jesus Christ as both Son of God and Son of Man.

It is a reading from one of the letters of St Athanasius who was patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt: *“The word is very close to us, the word who has become all things for us, our Lord Jesus Christ who promises to remain with us always”* and so he proclaims: *“Lo, I am with you all the days of the world. As he is the shepherd, high priest, the way and the door and has become all things at once for us, so he has appeared as our Feast.”*

By that St Athanasius means that He is the cause of all our rejoicing: *“We are now observing a solemn Feast”* he says, and asks the question: *“Which way are we to take, as we draw near to this day of celebration, Easter? Whom shall we have as Leader? No-one, dearly beloved, except Him whom you will name with me, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: ‘I am the Way (the Truth and the Life).’”*

The Latin for *The Way the Truth and the Life* is *Via, Veritas et Vita*. This, you must know, is the motto of Glasgow University, which was established by papal authority through the efforts of one of my

mediaeval predecessors. It had its beginnings in the crypt of Saint Mungo's Cathedral. My hope is that Saint Andrew's Cathedral on the banks of the Clyde, and at the centre of the Archdiocese, will in some manner continue the age-old but ever-new works of evangelisation. This means bringing the Gospel light of the Risen Christ to illumine our knowledge of what is right and good and increase our joy, and at the centre of the triangle formed by Saint Mungo's, the University of Glasgow and Saint Andrew's is the seat of our civic government, to the good of which we in our different ways offer our service and our blessing.