

## **Homily at Mass for Catholic Educators**

**Glasgow University Memorial Chapel – 9 October 2010**

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

“Remember the good news I carry” St Paul writes to Timothy in this evening’s epistle. “It is on account of this that I have my own hardships to bear, even to being chained like a criminal. But they cannot chain up God’s word!”

That symbol of breaking the chains which would limit our ability to proclaim the truth is one which is rather familiar here in Scotland – it was used on the masthead of one of our national newspapers for many years. The symbolism was clear – freedom to report the truth must not be constrained.

That freedom to speak the truth is one which the Church herself proclaims and enjoins on her members. It is a desire shared too by parents who traditionally wish to educate their children in the ways and truths of the faith.

“The preaching of the Gospel in Scotland has always been accompanied by a concern for the word - the inspired word of God and the culture in which that word takes root and flourishes,” said the Holy Father in his homily at Bellahouston Park here in Glasgow just over three weeks ago.

One cannot fail to note that word “flourish” during a visit to Glasgow since the motto of the city declares “Let Glasgow Flourish” which the completed sentence states as “by the preaching of the word and the praising of His name”.

Glasgow is Scotland’s largest city where the opportunities and the hard social realities of the Scottish industrial revolution were played out. The large Catholic minority population, composed wholly of immigrants, was hugely benefited by schools set up and staffed by religious congregations: Marists, Franciscans of the Immaculate Conception, Jesuits, Notre Dame Sisters and so on who were invited to establish themselves here and flourished, handing on an enormous legacy of a well educated Catholic laity, able in due course to take up the mantle of education and prepare succeeding generations for entry into the professions.

The Holy Father noted this in his address at Bellahouston. He said: “In the last 30 years *[since the full implementation of the comprehensive school model]* and with the assistance of civil authorities, Scottish Catholic Schools have taken up the challenge of providing an integral education to greater numbers of students and this has helped young people, not only along the path of spiritual and human growth, but also in entering the professions and public life.

“This is a sign of great hope for the Church and I encourage the Catholic professionals, politicians and teachers of Scotland never to lose sight of their calling to use their talents and experience in the service of the faith, engaging contemporary Scottish culture at every level.”

The Holy Father in his address to school children at Twickenham – an address broadcast to some 800,000 children throughout Britain - stressed the holistic character of Catholic education.

He said: "A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person and a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints." Aware that there were many non-Catholics studying in Catholic schools throughout Britain, the Holy Father added: "I pray that you too will feel encouraged to practice virtue and to grow in knowledge and friendship with God alongside your Catholic classmates."

In Glasgow many Muslim families aim to register their children in our Catholic schools, considering their attention to spiritual values and to the school's ethos as important factors. I think we can expect parental choice to continue this demand for Catholic schools.

Of course our schools do not exist in a vacuum, but rather in a pluralist culture. The Holy Father noted how the Church's social teaching accorded with the best intentions of British society.

He said: "Britain has emerged as a pluralist democracy which places great value on freedom of speech, freedom of political affiliation and respect for the role of law, with a strong sense of the individual's rights and duties, and the equality of all citizens before the law.

"While couched in different language Catholic teaching has much in common with this approach, in its over-riding concern to safeguard the unique dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God, and in its emphasis on the duty of civil authority to foster the common good."

Finally, recalling that this is the day reserved in the liturgical calendar for the memorial of Blessed John Henry Newman, so recently beatified by the Holy Father, it would be appropriate to make mention as the Holy Father did, of his "vision for education" which he said "had done so much to shape the ethos that is the driving force behind Catholic schools and colleges today.

The Pope added: "Firmly opposed to any reductive or utilitarian approach he sought to achieve an educational environment in which intellectual training, moral discipline and religious commitment would come together."

What better goal could teachers of religion set themselves than Blessed John Henry's famous appeal for an intelligent, well instructed laity: "I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it and who know so much of history that they can defend it."

I am sure that is a desire which we can all share.

Amen.

