

## Mass for Knights of St Columba, St Andrew's Cathedral June 8 2011

My dear Knights, brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is a great pleasure to be with you tonight on your patronal feast. St Columba, under whose heavenly protection you rejoice, is one of the great Scottish saints. His life and example continuing to have an impact on this land 1400 years after his death.

It was St Paul who famously wrote that "the life and death of each one of us has an effect on others". If that was evidently true in the case of St Columba it should also be true in the case of his spiritual sons, the Knights of St Columba.

Your august organisation was founded in this very city in 1919 and in its own statutes describes itself as being dedicated to the principles of Charity, Unity and Fraternity.

The history books state in a rather charming way: "The Knights of Saint Columba was founded by an [Irish migrant](#) from [Cork](#), Patrick Joseph O'Callaghan in [Glasgow, Scotland](#). He gathered a meeting of twenty-four Catholic gentlemen on 5 October 1919, at Central Halls, Bath Street, Glasgow, where the men present agreed to found a fraternal organisation. The founders, known as the *Incorporators*, looked to model the organisation on the [Knights of Columbus](#), which had existed since 1882 in the [United States](#) after being founded by a priest [Michael J. McGivney](#). A similar organisation had also been founded in Ireland a few years earlier, known as the [Knights of Saint Columbanus](#)."

From the beginning the Knights have been a reliable and loyal body of dedicated Catholic laymen whose support the Bishops have always been able to rely on. For this I thank you publicly and sincerely this evening.

Of course the society we live in today is very different from that of the founding fathers almost a century ago. Then Catholics struggled with

institutionalised discrimination, poverty, educational disadvantage, poverty and so on.

Today the problems are different – secularisation in society, attacks on the marriage-based family, a spiritual and cultural poverty, and a misguided “rights agenda” among others.

But as Knights of St Columba – by definition, committed Catholic lay persons – you are asked to be in the forefront of the struggle to protect and defend the Church’s teaching.

On preparing for this occasion I took down from my bookshelf a copy of the Vatican II document on the role of the lay person in the modern world. And discovered what a treasure trove it was of practical advice and guidance.

Time does not allow me to quote at length; I will however summarise some of the Decree on the Lay Apostolate’s key points.

- It starts by reminding us “that it is proper to the lay person’s state in life for him or her to spend their days in the midst of the world and of secular transactions. The layperson is called by God to burn with the Spirit of Christ and to exercise an apostolate in the world as a kind of leaven.”
- It reminds us of the awkward truth that we sometimes have to challenge our friends, colleagues and neighbours with questions of faith ... the document says: “a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life.” (AA6)
- It reminds us of the importance of marriage: “The apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society”. We realize this more and more with each passing day as marriage ceases to enjoy the respect it was traditionally given. (AA11)

- It reminds us of our responsibility for making our own homes and community truly Christian ... “The effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others. In this area the laity can exercise the apostolate of like toward like.” (AA9)
- And it calls on us to act not only as individuals but also as a parish community in witnessing to Christ ... “The faithful should participate in the apostolate by way of united effort. The group apostolate is very important” (AA17)

I wish in a special way to remind you of the important role of the Parish Pastoral Council to which some of you will belong as vehicles for implementing this vision, as well as your own organisation which can be a striking manifestation of this plan of life.

It is in these *fora* that new strategies for the training of lay people, promotion of opportunities for development, ideas for building up the faith life of the parish and so on should be addressed.

Circumstances change but the tools to achieve great things are the same as they always were ... as Pope John Paul reminded us when he came to Bellahouston Park 25 years ago: “Be loyal to the memory of those valiant forerunners in the Faith. Be diligent in handing on intact the spiritual heritage committed to you. Be faithful to your daily prayers, to the Holy Mass and the Sacrament of Penance, meeting regularly with Jesus as a loving and merciful Saviour. Defend the sacredness of Life and the holiness of Matrimony. Understand your holy Catholic faith and live by its teaching. Face up to the difficult challenges of modern life with Christian fortitude and patience.”

I can do no better than to make those words my own this evening as I salute you for your service and encourage you to persevere in the faith.