

10th December 2009

***Letter to Religious Men and Women of the Archdiocese
From the Archbishop***

Dearest Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am glad to take the opportunity of the Christmas post to greet each and every one of you who contribute so much to the life and wellbeing of our Archdiocese.

Your service takes many forms, but there are aspects of it which are common to you all, not least that of community, for it is in your acting together under the inspiration of a charism that originally formed you, that your best services are provided to the Church, both universally and locally.

How richly endowed we are as a Church with these charisms, these gifts of grace, which you reflect and represent. You may well feel at times that you are taken for granted, but I think that is a common feeling among those who are in the pastoral ministry, who exercise the role of teachers, and indeed are parents. To put it another way, we have learnt to rely on you, and our love for you is not less by it not being expressed in terms of thanksgiving day-by-day, which is why it is so valuable to have this opportunity, that of Christmas, to express our sentiments.

In a society where the family would appear to be more and more under attack, or simply swept aside, or treated almost as an irrelevance, your communities provide an example which can be an inspiration within and outwith the Church. In this season we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. Others have pointed out that it is anything but a natural family. It is in a sense the coming together of three vocations, though in the case of Christ we would on reflection be better to use the word *mission*. All of you come together to form families by reason of a specific vocation, which also involves a special mission. I think what I am suggesting in this letter is that an essential aspect of your mission, like that of the Holy Family itself, is to demonstrate the beauty of relationships formed or informed by grace.

In this respect could I share with you a few words of the late Pope Paul VI, which he gave in an address on 5th January 1964, and which today are to be found in the Divine Office for the Feast of the Holy Family? I am sharing these words also with our teachers because they have a ready resonance with them also as they seek to create, as part of their Catholic ethos, a sense of community or family within their schools. Here are Paul VI's words:

"The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus – the school of the Gospel.

The first lesson we learn here is to look, to listen, to meditate and penetrate the meaning – at once so deep and so mysterious – of this very simple, very humble and very beautiful manifestation of the Son of God. Perhaps we learn, even imperceptibly, the lesson of imitation.

Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ.

How gladly would I become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and a higher wisdom of divine truths”.

And for you, dear brothers and sisters, as for me, the following words are particularly appropriate:

"May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us, besieged as we are by so many uplifted voices, the general noise and uproar, in our seething and over-sensitised modern life.

May the silence of Nazareth teach us recollection, inwardness, the disposition to listen to good inspirations and the teachings of true masters. They teach us the need for and the value of preparation, of study, of meditation, of personal inner life, of the prayer which God alone sees in secret”.

I wish you all from my heart a very peaceful, joyful, and rewarding Christmas.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

✘ Mario Conti
Archbishop of Glasgow