

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

---



Catechesis  
Toronto  
Thursday 25 July 2002  
Most Rev. Mario J. Conti, Archbishop of Glasgow

## *Matthew 5: 14*

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven".

Let me tell you something about myself: for twenty-five years I was Bishop of Aberdeen in the north-east of Scotland.....

On 17<sup>th</sup> June last year Cardinal Winning, Archbishop of Glasgow, died suddenly; on 29<sup>th</sup> December I was told that the Holy Father had nominated me to replace him – Cardinal Winning that is!

It has been all go ever since! And much of the ‘go’ has been outside of the Archdiocese – since I already had a programme of events as Bishop of Aberdeen which I had to honour – including my Silver Jubilee as a Bishop, and I inherited a programme of events – including leading the Archdiocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes from which I returned the day before I came here (when I couldn’t get my case closed I realised I had put clean linen in without removing the old!)

I have truly been a Roaming Catholic – or a phantom Archbishop in recent weeks!

At Lourdes I was press-ganged into singing a song at the Ceilidh for the sick. When I saw how readily the young people were giving of their best I could not refuse!

But I got my own back – in a sort of way – by singing the following well-known Scots music hall song:

*When I was a child, a tiny wee child  
My mother said to me,  
Come see the Northern lights my child,  
They're bright as they can be.  
She called them the heavenly dancers,  
Merry dancers in the sky  
I'll never forget that wonderful sight,  
They made the heavens bright.*

### Chorus:

*Oh the Northern Lights of Old Aberdeen  
Seem home sweet home to me.  
The Northern Lights of Old Aberdeen  
Are what I long to see.  
I've been a wand'rer all of my life  
And many's a sight I've seen  
Godspeed the day  
When I'm on my way*

The phenomenon referred to in this song is called the Aurora Borealis, literally the ‘Northern Dawn’. It is an extremely beautiful sight – rays of coloured light flash or dance across the northern sky – the ‘merry dancers’.

I remember as a student in Rome climbing up Monte Cavo, near the Holy Father's summer residence in what are called the Castelli Romani, in the dark, to see the dawn race across the Roman Campagna. Within a very short period of time the darkness was dispelled – beautiful, golden light gently bathed the vineyards and rolling plain of the countryside around Rome and eventually we could see it reflected on the dome of St Peter's in the far distance.

How beautiful is the dawn – it is the birth of a new day – it is a symbol of hope.

Even the false dawn of the Northern Lights is a harbinger of light, telling us that the sun is shining where we cannot see it – reflecting off the northern snows.

Like the moon rising, not the source of light, but a reflection of it.

Do you recall the name of Zechariah? He was the father of St John the Baptist.

At the circumcision of his son, his tongue was loosed and he spoke – full of the Holy Spirit – of what was to come:

"For you my child will be called the prophet of the Most High – for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways: to give His people the knowledge of salvation – by the forgiveness of their sins.

Because of the tender mercy of our God with which the sunrise from on high will visit us. To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death – to guide our feet into the way of peace".

Zachary is saying that his son – John – will be like the merry dancers, foretelling the dawn - he leapt in his mother's womb – the dawn/the sunrise is He who is to come, dispelling the darkness of sin and showing us the ways of peace.

(It is Jesus whom he foretells.)

He (John) was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

He came as a witness – says St John the Evangelist – to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. There was the true light which coming into the world, enlightens every man.

St Matthew in his Gospel tells us that after his temptations in the wilderness, "Jesus came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali" and remarks:

"This was to fulfil what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light and those who were sitting in a land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned".

Jesus began to preach and say: "Repent (turn to God) for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand".

You know we are the people on whom that light – the Christ light has shone. We are children of the light. We carry in our hands our Baptismal candles, lit from the Paschal Candle of the Risen Christ.

[I want you to turn to one another and share your baptismal names and tell one another of any experience you have had which illustrates what I have been saying – any experience of baptism, of the Easter Vigil and its significance, of the dawning of faith in your own lives.]

I want to return to Lourdes [in one sense]

There is a short passage in the latest edition of the Lourdes magazine telling of what happened at Lourdes and its significance:

A strange adventure!

*Below the little town of Lourdes in the French Pyrenees, on the morning of Thursday, February 11th, 1858, a poor little girl went down to gather wood on the edge of a river. Suddenly, in a grotto, she received the sweet visit of a "young lady" of light who appeared in the crevice of a rock. Later, the truth came out: it was the Virgin Mary who appeared to her! What a strange adventure this child had. Her name was Bernadette Soubirous. At the time of her vision, she didn't know how to read or write but she had a lot of common sense and loved Jesus and Mary more than anything! People from around the world heard about her story of faith and prayer... Today, multitudes of people come from the four corners of the world. About 6 million people come to Lourdes every year to deepen their faith and to find comfort when life becomes difficult... Lourdes is a place of light! There you can receive Jesus' love which he gives continuously in service to others, in Communion, adoration and the Sacrament of Forgiveness! In Lourdes, more than a century ago, God trusted a child that was a lot like you. God is calling you, just as he called Bernadette, to be a ray of sunshine to those around you.*

I saw that ray of sunshine in Lourdes in the group of young boys and girls who accompanied the sick, St Margaret of Scotland Youth Group. They made me a member – gave me this cap – and so I was qualified to join the youth in Toronto! [Great Cheers]

They wheeled the sick in their voitures. They fetched food and drink for them. They spoke and prayed with them. They showed them love and sang them songs and they enjoyed themselves hugely, and so they deserved to carry bowls of incense in the Blessed Sacrament Procession – the boys in their white shirts and kilts and the girls in their whites with tartan sashes, carrying torches and banners.

I was immensely proud of them, as I am of you!

Jesus said: "You are the light of the world" [you are to reflect Christ who is the light] "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven".

[Now I would like you to tell one another of any experience you have had where you realised that what you had said or done brought help or happiness to someone else.]

Light illuminates and warms –

*Illuminates*

The light in our minds is that of faith and hope which by sharing with others we can help them reach the truth.

*Warms*

The light in our hearts is that of charity/of love by which we warm the lives of others. That light is truly a reflection of Christ who is, in St John's words, the light of life.

He wrote in his Prologue, introduction to the gospel:

"All things came into being through him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life and the life was the light of men – the light shines in the darkness and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth".

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

---



Catechesis  
Toronto

Friday 26 July 2002

Most Rev. Mario J. Conti, Archbishop of Glasgow

*2 Corinthians 5: 20*

"We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God".

Our theme today is **Reconciliation** and it is part of an extended catechesis which the Holy Father has not only suggested, but which he himself has addressed – as we heard yesterday when we greeted him – and he greeted us.

First we had the theme of the Salt of the earth and we recalled the words of Jesus addressed to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth".

Our Holy Father commented (last August): "One of the main functions of salt is to season food, to give it taste and flavour – through baptism our whole being has been profoundly changed because it has been seasoned with the new life from Christ.

The salt that keeps our Christian identity intact, even in a very secularised world is the grace of baptism...

As the salt of the earth you are called to preserve the faith which you have received and to pass it on intact to others. Your generation ... is being challenged in a special way to keep safe the deposit of faith, i.e. what has been handed down to you."

Those who are engaged with young people, especially in their teenage years, I mean teachers, pastors, youth leaders, know how strong peer pressure can be. By that we mean the influence of the whole group on individuals – on the way they dress, the music they buy, the food they eat, the sort of recreation and socialising they apparently enjoy. It is like a river – we can no longer identify the streams which have fed it – the water flows in one lot.

But for the individual who sees that the course is not what he or she wants to follow, it can be very difficult to withstand the pressure. It is like swimming against the current. But there may be times when being faithful to oneself - to what one has received - to Christ – it is necessary to swim against the stream.

Here in Toronto the counter-current of young people who want to follow Christ is very strong. Here is a company of Christians who encouraged by one another can withstand the pressures of the world to conform to its standards and instead to follow Christ, - to live lives of integrity, purity, generosity of heart, honesty, and to experience the joy of so-doing.

This joy comes from Christ whose Spirit is in us. *My peace I give you – not as the world gives it – do I give it. But give it he does. Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right.*

This counter-current which we need the strength to maintain becomes our witness. We have to influence the society in which we live. That very word **influence** is significant. It means to 'flow in'.

Jesus used two images to describe it – the first was that of salt which works from within; the second was light which operates from outside – illuminating, warming us and through us the lives of others.

But of course to be effective witnesses we must ourselves have been salted by Christ and enlightened by Him.

The Holy Father remarks: The light that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel is the light of faith.

*"I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life".*

"Our personal encounter with Christ bathes life in new light, sets us on the right path and sends us out to be witnesses".

"In this secularised age when many of our contemporaries think and act as if God did not exist or are attracted to material forms of religion, it is you, dear young people, who must show that faith is a personal decision, which involves your whole life ..."

*I would like you to share with one another for a few minutes something of the difficulties you yourselves have encountered - at school – at work – perhaps even at home – in being true to your faith.*

When I was a young priest I was appointed to a parish where a hundred years before a group of Flemish missionaries had made their home - and centre.

They found a large barn of a church which a priest had managed to build around 1831. He was called Fr. Walter Lovi and was sent by his bishop to minister to itinerant Catholics who had gone to the north of Scotland in connection with the seasonal herring fishing which boomed in the early part of the nineteenth century and carried on throughout most of it. There were no native Catholics left in the most northerly part of Scotland nor in the northern isles of Orkney and Shetland. We have his correspondence with his bishop in which he described a certain community antipathy towards their Catholics which resulted in his being unable to find a place where he could celebrate Mass for them. However then he reports the outbreak of a famous cholera epidemic which moved south from the northern isles and hit the mainland of Scotland. Most of the professional people left the towns including Wick where he was staying. He did not leave. In fact he sought medicines from his bishop and administered these to the sick with beneficial effect, not only for the sick, but also for his work as a priest. A grateful community offered him a site and he was able by appeals not only to Catholics in Scotland, but elsewhere in Europe, to gain money for the building of a church. His actions are a powerful example of the way in which we can witness not only by our faith but by our good works to our love for Our Lord and His Gospel.

Some thirty years later others came to witness to their Catholic Faith for it was to this church and small chapel house that there came a group of Flemish missionaries. They formed what was called the *Mission to the Arctic Regions*, or the *Vicariate of the North Pole* as it was also called. They had been given the task of bringing the Catholic Faith not only to the people of Caithness and the northern islands of Scotland, but also to a wide missionary territory that extended from Hudson Bay in Northern Canada to Greenland, Iceland, the Faro Islands and Lapland at the very north of Norway within the Arctic Region. There today at Thromsoe there is a Catholic bishop of a diocese.

It was these Flemish missionaries that provided the dedication of the Church since when they arrived they discovered it had as yet no dedication. With the approval of the Vicar Apostolic they named it St Joachim's, as a result of a promise made by one of them prior to his coming. A hundred years later another set of Catholic immigrants, this time workers in the atomic energy industry, necessitated the erection of another church in Caithness at Thurso. It was natural that it should be dedicated to St Anne. I was Parish Priest of St Joachim's and St Anne's for nearly fifteen years. It was then that I came across an account of the missionary endeavours of this group of pioneering priests.

Among the stories they told was that of one of their number arriving on the isles of Orkney. He had hardly arrived when someone asked him to visit a woman some distance away. When he came he found that she was dying, but had always harboured the hope of becoming a catholic. He was able to receive her into the Church – to reconcile her on her deathbed. He marvelled at the providence of God and remarked: "God would send an angel if necessary to bring even one soul to safety in God's arms."

Our theme is Reconciliation – our being ambassadors for Christ. Reconciliation means basically our return to God.

Our very baptism is a form of reconciliation since we are all born with tendencies towards self, selfishness, sin.

The Spirit of God is given to us as the principle of the Christ-life in us. When Jesus entered on his public ministry it was with the words: "Repent – turn to God – for the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand".

But reconciliation is an ongoing task – we ever have a need to repent – to turn to God anew...

The Sacrament of Reconciliation provides us with the opportunity of forever returning to the Lord...

I was at Lourdes recently. I decided to go to confession and I went to what had previously been the Hospital, now fitted out as a Chapel of Reconciliation. I joined a queue and in due course my turn came.

It is always more difficult for a priest – even worse for a bishop, to have a face to face with a fellow priest! Despite the circumstances, which included a queue waiting for confession, the confessor offered me a passage of scripture. It was the following:

*"I do not call you servants any more – I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my father".*

Providentially I had need of that passage later. At a Holy Hour in the Hospital, and I recall it now as we reflect on the theme of Reconciliation, for, having been reconciled ourselves, we are sent to be ambassadors of Christ's peace.

An ambassador is one who knows his prince's mind – who is privy to his purposes – who is ready to advocate his cause.

And we, says St Paul, are ambassadors for Christ. "It is", he says, "as though God were making an appeal through us" and he gives us our message: "we beg you on behalf of Christ – be reconciled to God."

Every ambassador has to present his/her letters of credence. Usually this is a very formal event. In London, for example, a horse-drawn carriage is sent to bring the Ambassador to the Queen. People in the street will recognise that an Ambassador is carrying with him a Letter of Credence which he will present to the Sovereign.

What is our letter of credence as ambassadors for Christ? How do we establish the authenticity of our commission?

Those to whom we are sent – those among whom we dwell as ambassadors - must read that letter in our lives. In other words, our lives should be an eloquent testimony to our Faith in Christ Jesus, and to the message of Reconciliation which he has addressed to us, and of which we are to be the couriers.

Let me say to you what St Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "As for you, it is plain that you are a letter that has come from Christ, given to us to deliver; a letter written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, written not on stone tablets, but on the pages of the human heart." (2 Cor. 3, 3)

In this way "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us".

*(Note: The Mass that followed was of St Joachim and St Anne whose Feast Day it was)*