

Pastoral letter to the Priests, Deacons, Religious and Laity of the Archdiocese

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our Archdiocese will shortly have the immense privilege of hosting a visit from our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI. Such visits are a rare occurrence, and only the second of a reigning pope in the long history of our country. It will be an historic occasion. It will also be a moment of grace, for Pope Benedict is the Successor of Saint Peter, to whom the Lord committed the care of His Church saying *"Feed my lambs, feed my sheep"*.

At the Last Supper Jesus said to Peter *"Simon, Simon! Satan, you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers"* (Lk 22:31).

At times we may all feel the Church has in recent months been under hostile scrutiny and that clergy particularly have been sifted like wheat. We need the presence of Simon Peter to bolster our faith and give us new courage to face the difficulties and ease the pain which the Church and each one of us must necessarily encounter in an imperfect and ever changing world.

We preach the Gospel above all by witnessing to it in the integrity of our lives and in the love we show towards God in prayer and worship, and in service one of another. The Mass at Bellahouston will manifest all these elements.

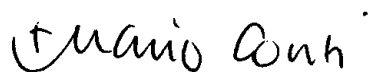
Of course our attendance will involve hardships of one sort or another, depending upon our age and the circumstances of weather and travel. Those who come from a great distance will benefit from our contributing the same amount as is requested of them to defray the expenses of transport and other costs. We who are privileged to be close at hand will thereby give a warm welcome to our fellow pilgrims from afar.

Above all our welcome will be for the person of the Holy Father himself, who will have been received by Her Majesty the Queen in Edinburgh before travelling to Glasgow. It is in recognition of the international standing of the Holy Father, and of the Church he leads that her government has invited him. Our national and local authorities, in particular the Scottish Government, Glasgow City Council, Strathclyde Police and transport chiefs have responded with remarkable enthusiasm in the making of the necessary arrangements for his reception.

Physical arrangements are one thing; our pastoral and spiritual preparations are another. Copious materials have already been provided to parishes, and further assistance is being made available to ensure that the final weeks of preparation will open us up to the many graces we anticipate from the occasion.

Next Sunday, August 15th – the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady, and her principal feast, will be a month to the eve of the Holy Father's coming – a month of spiritual preparation shaped to the capacity and needs of each parish under the leadership of parish priests and pastoral councils. We pray to Our Blessed Lady that she may be in the midst of us in prayer for the success of this visit, which will give honour to her Son and renew us all in Spirit.

With every blessing,
Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mario Conti". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

✘ Mario Conti
Archbishop of Glasgow