



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

HOLY MASS IN BELLAHOUSTON PARK

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Glasgow

Tuesday, 1 June 1982

Dear sons and daughters of the Catholic Church in Scotland!

1. Sacred Scripture bears eloquent witness to the unshakable faith which one generation of mankind to the next placed in God. From the time of Abraham onwards through the centuries, that truth remained firmly founded on God's promise to send a Saviour who would deliver his people.

Of all the expressions of faith none was more spontaneous than that uttered by Andrew, the fisherman of Galilee: "We have found the Messiah!" (*Io.* 1, 41). So profound was the impression Jesus made upon him at their first encounter that "early next morning Andrew met his brother and said to him 'We have found the Messiah' - which means the Christ - and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked hard at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas - meaning Rock'" (*Ibid.* 1, 41-42). It was *Andrew*, the heavenly patron of your beloved Scotland, *who introduced Peter to Jesus!*

2. Today marks another significant moment in the history of our salvation: the Successor of Peter comes to visit the spiritual children of Andrew! We are bound one to another by a supernatural brotherhood stronger than that of blood. Here and now we testify that we profess that identical faith in Jesus, and we firmly hope that we too can lead others to him. This *common profession of faith* is the compelling motive behind my pastoral visit to your homeland.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, let us reflect for a few moments on the texts of Sacred Scripture that

have been proclaimed in this Liturgy of the Word.

We are gathered here on this Scottish hillside to celebrate Mass. Are we not like those first disciples and followers who sat at the feet of Jesus on the hillside near Capernaum? What did Jesus teach them? What does our divine Master wish to teach us, each and every one of us, today? With words simple and clear, Jesus outlined *the requirements for admission to his heavenly Kingdom*. He offered reflections on every aspect of daily life. Jesus proposed a new concept of living. In the short introductory phrases to his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sounded the keynote of the New Era he had come to proclaim.

The new spirit is to be gentle, generous, simple, and above all sincere. To avoid being arrogant, censorious, or self-seeking. The disciples of the new Kingdom must seek happiness even amidst poverty, deprivation, tears and oppression. To aim for the Kingdom requires a radical change in outlook, in mentality, in behaviour, in relations with others. Just as the Law revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, so, in this *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus, the new Lawgiver, offers to all mankind a new way of life, *a charter of Christian life*.

How astonished those first listeners must have been at hearing these dramatic words of Christ!

Especially those who were poor in spirit, gentle, or afflicted, downtrodden and oppressed - to hear themselves proclaimed as eligible for entry into a heavenly Kingdom.

4. It is this *loving Fatherhood of God* which pervades every word of Jesus. Throughout this discourse he appeals to his listeners to respond to the Father, with a response of filial love.

Everyone who will be animated by this new spirit is a child of God. This is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into our lives again: it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out, "Abba, Father" (*Rom. 8, 14-15*).

Love can ask more than fear can demand. Love will be the mainspring of the New Era. Jesus affirmed this on a later occasion: "If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him" (*Jo. 14, 23*).

5. In the qualities required of the true disciples of Jesus we can see the image of Jesus himself, traced by the prophets in the Old Testament, but described anew in these Beatitudes. Quite clearly it was the intention of Jesus that *the lives of his disciples should be modelled on his own*. "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (*Matth. 11, 28-29*). While elsewhere he says: "No one can come to the Father except through me" (*Jo. 14, 6*).

6. It is essential for us to understand that Jesus has a specific task in life for each and every one of

us. Each one of us is hand-picked, called by name - by Jesus! There is no one among us who does not have a divine vocation! Now this is what Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, which was proclaimed a few moments ago: "Each one of us has been given our own share of grace, given as Christ allotted it. And to some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; so that the saints make a unity in the work of service" (*Eph. 4, 7. 11-12*).

First and foremost, God has called us into existence. He has called us to be! He has called us, through his Son Jesus Christ, to a knowledge of himself as our loving Father. He has called us to be his children! He has called us to fulfil his eternal plan in our individual lives, with Jesus as our guide.

He has called us to be co-heirs with Jesus of his heavenly Kingdom! What God our Father is offering us through his Son is a *new life as his real children, with Jesus for our brother*, a pressing call to live, to love, to labour for the coming of his Kingdom. And lest, bewildered at what we must do, we hesitate, Jesus offers to be himself our guide and says: "Come, follow me!" (*Luc. 9, 59*).

7. Dearly beloved in Christ! *What response has Scotland given* in the past to God's invitation?

Christian history narrates that from very early times, perhaps even as early as the second half of the fourth century, Scotland embraced the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For over one thousand five hundred years his holy Name has been invoked in this land. Saint Ninian, Saint Columba and Saint Kentigern were the first to evangelise the pagans and establish a primitive Christian Church. After the Dark Ages had passed, during which the Viking invasions failed to quench the light of the Faith, the coming of Queen Margaret inaugurated a new chapter in the history of the Church in Scotland, which received fresh vigour from internal reorganization and from closer contact with the universal Church.

Although situated geographically on the remote edge of Europe, the Church in Scotland became *especially dear to the Popes*, at the centre and heart of Christianity, and they conferred upon it the exceptional title *Specialis Filia Romanae Ecclesiae*, "*Special Daughter of the Roman Church!*"

What a magnificent designation!

The Church was intimately involved in the struggle for national independence, with the bishops - men like Robert Wishart of Glasgow - to the forefront of your patriots. And *throughout the later Middle Ages* our holy Faith continued to flourish in these parts, fine cathedrals and collegiate churches being built, numerous monastic houses being endowed, across the length and breadth of this land. The names of Bishops Wardlaw, Turnbull and Elphinstone remain inseparably linked with the foundation of your universities, of which this little nation has always been so justifiably proud.

While Scottish scholars, such as Duns Scotus, Richard of Saint Victor and John Major, gained an international repute for learning and brought honour to their native land.

The *sixteenth century* found the churchmen and the laity unprepared for the religious upheaval of that day, which vehemently swept away the mediaeval Church from Scotland, almost, though not quite, without trace. The hierarchy became extinct; the remnant of the faithful was dispersed: Scotland was isolated from the reforms decreed by the Council of Trent.

Even this, however forms part of God's providence: for the centuries that followed witnessed a *valiant struggle for survival*, in the face of persecution and exile. To remedy the scarcity of priests, Pope Clement VIII founded a college in Rome for your young countrymen and similar seminaries were opened in other safe places on the Continent, to send labourers back to the "Scottish Mission". The religious Orders too released trained members to collaborate in that work. Who has not heard of Saint John Ogilvie, the Jesuit, who - only a few miles from where I now stand - surrendered life itself to witness to the Faith of Christ!

The *Vicars Apostolic*, to whom the organization of all the missionary activity was entrusted, testified in their letters to Rome to the attachment of that handful of Scottish Catholics to the Faith of their Fathers, to the See of Peter and to the person of the Pope. Carefully preserved throughout all these years, these documents now serve as a mirror, in which is accurately reflected the noble face of the Scottish Catholic community, lined with the unmistakable signs of poverty and hardship, but radiant with expectation that in God's own time a new day would surely dawn for the Church in Scotland.

Dear beloved Catholics of Scotland, the prayers of your forefathers did not go unanswered! Their *firm hope in divine providence was not disillusioned!* A century and a half ago the tide of repression turned. The small Catholic community gradually gained new vitality. The advent of numerous Catholic emigrants from nearby Ireland, accompanied by zealous Irish priests, enlarged and enriched it spiritually. This induced Pope Leo XIII to restore the Catholic hierarchy to Scotland - the very first act of his pontificate - and since that moment there has been a rapid and continuous progress.

8. You are the heirs to the sacred heritage. Your forefathers have handed on to you the only inheritance they really prized, *our holy Catholic faith!* From heaven their heartfelt appeal to you would be this: "Set your hearts on his Kingdom" (*Luc. 12, 31*). With grateful hearts turn to God and thank him that tranquil days have been restored to the Catholic community in Scotland.

9. What was a dream a century ago has become the reality of today. A complete transformation of Catholic life has come about in Scotland, with the Catholics of Scotland assuming their legitimate role in every sector of public life and some of them invested with the most important and prestigious offices of this land. Is this not what Saint Paul has to say to us in today's reading from

Ephesians: “So the body grows, until it has built itself up, in love” (*Eph. 4, 16*).

You originate in a glorious past, but you do not live in the past. You belong to the present and your generation must not be content simply to rest on the laurels won by your grandparents and great-grandparents. You must give *your response to Christ’s call* to follow him and enter with him as co-heirs into his Father’s heavenly Kingdom. But we find it harder to follow Christ today than appears to have been the case before. Witnessing to him in modern life means a daily contest, not so quickly and decisively resolved as for the martyrs in the past. As believers we are constantly exposed to pressures by modern society, which would compel us to conform to the standards of this secular age, substitute new priorities, restrict our aspirations at the risk of compromising our Christian conscience.

10. The spirit of this world would have us capitulate on the *most fundamental principles of our Christian life*. Today as never before, the basic doctrines of the Faith are questioned and the value of Christian morality challenged and ridiculed. Things abhorred a generation ago are now inscribed in the statute books of society! These are issues of the utmost gravity to which a simple answer cannot be given; neither are they answered by being ignored. Matters of such magnitude demand the fullest attention of our Christian conscience.

11. To provide the answers to such questions is a daunting task. It would be an impossible challenge for the majority of the faithful to attempt unaided. But you are not alone. *The Spirit of God is operative in the Church*. Never before as in recent years has the teaching of the Catholic Church been so extensively reformulated, precisely with the issues that trouble the modern conscience in mind. It is sufficient to list the topics on which the Popes, the Ecumenical Council, the Synod of Bishops, and the various national Episcopal Conferences, including that of the Scottish Bishops, have given authoritative and clear statements of Catholic belief and practice for the guidance of the faithful in these perplexing times. In the name of all the shepherds of Christ’s flock, to whom the office of pastors and teachers has been divinely entrusted (*Eph. 4, 11*), I assure you that we are acutely aware of the problems you have to face in life, and of the anxiety which so often fills your hearts.

12. In fulfilling that solemn charge of leading the flock to eternal life, we must keep ever in mind the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy: “Proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience - but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching . . . Make the preaching of the Good News your life’s work” (*2 Tim. 4, 2. 5*).

Dear brothers and sisters! Preaching the Good News of Jesus is my life’s work. In addition, I now have another ministry to fulfil in the Church as Successor of Simon Peter, to whom Jesus himself said: “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail . . . you in your turn must strengthen your brothers” (*Luc. 22, 31*). It is for this that I have come from Rome to Scotland. For this I joyfully accepted the invitation of your Bishops to come and *confirm you in our Catholic Faith*

“that comes to us from the Apostles” («Canon Romanus»).

13. Allow me, therefore, to make my own the exhortation of Saint Paul, addressed to you in today’s Liturgy: “I implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation” (*Eph. 4, 1*). And in Christ’s own words, “You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world” (*Matth. 5, 13-14*), called by God our Father to be his apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the men and women of this present generation, whom you must lead to Jesus, just as Andrew once led his brother Simon Peter. *Your commitment* to the sure ways of Christian living could well be decisive in bringing salvation to many.

The world still recognizes genuine goodness for what it is!

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.

Did not Jesus himself say to his disciples: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me”? (*Ibid. 14, 24; Marc. 8, 34*)

14. Beloved sons and daughters! I have been kept fully informed of the careful preparations, spread over many months, which have preceded my pastoral visit to Scotland. With admiration and satisfaction I have followed the intense programme proposed by the Bishops for a spiritual renewal of the Catholic community, to ensure that the effects of my visit produce fruits that will endure.

From the depths of my heart *I thank each and every one of you* for the prayers that have accompanied this preparation, for every effort that has been made to guarantee its success. “This is the day made memorable by the Lord: what immense joy for us!” (*Ps. 118, 24*). I commend you all, Bishops, clergy, religious and laity to the maternal intercession of Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

15. Before concluding, I wish to address for a few moments that larger community of believers in Christ, who share with my Catholic brothers and sisters the privilege of being Scots, sons and daughters alike of this ancient nation. I know of the veneration in which you hold the Sacred Scriptures, accepting them for what they are, the word of God, and not of man. I have reserved until now and should like to read to you the remaining words from that passage of Saint Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “There is one body, one Spirit, just as you were all called. There is one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all” (*Eph. 4, 5-6*).

This passage clearly reveals the will of God for mankind, a plan human wills may oppose but cannot thwart. It is God's plan for all of us, "for there is no eternal city for us in this life but we look for one in the life to come" (*Hebr.* 13, 15). We are only pilgrims on this earth, making our way towards that heavenly Kingdom promised to us as God's children. Beloved brethren in Christ, for the future, *can we not make that pilgrimage together hand-in-hand*, "bearing with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience," doing all we can "to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds us together"? (*Eph.* 4, 2-3) This would surely bring down upon us the blessing of God our Father on our pilgrim way.

As we now proceed to celebrate Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice, let us remember all those - on both sides - who are affected by the conflict in the South Atlantic. In the joy of our celebration today we cannot permit ourselves to forget the victims of war, both the dead men and the wounded, as well as the broken hearts of many families.

Let us beseech the God of mercy to give us peace in this our day - the peace of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

16. Beloved People of Scotland, in conclusion I wish you and all who are dear to you, wherever they may be, the abundance of God's blessings, so that your families may prosper and peace and harmony may reign in your homes. May the prayers of the blessed Apostles Peter and Andrew obtain this for you!

And for your dearly beloved Scottish homeland I wish to adapt and make my own the words familiar to many of you: "Lord, *let Scotland flourish* through the preaching of Thy word and the praising of Thy name!" Amen.

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