

**HOMILY FOR TEACHERS, HEADTEACHERS AND
EDUCATIONALISTS**

GLASGOW CATHEDRAL

JUNE 14, 2013

My Dear Brothers and Sisters and in Christ,

I am delighted to be here this evening to celebrate this Mass of Thanksgiving with you. I have been to Scotland a number of times but have never before visited this Glasgow or this beautiful Cathedral and I am, therefore, very grateful to Archbishop Phillip for his kind invitation and his gracious hospitality.

It is good to see so many people here tonight – but it is a particular joy for me to greet the pupils of the various Catholic schools represented here in such great numbers. That you have freely given up your Friday evening to come here to Mass is a tribute not only to your faith but also to your generosity of heart. I want to commend and encourage you in that generosity. Be generous with God, dear young people, in your prayer, in your lives and in your fidelity to his Church, and God will be superabundantly generous with you in return by pouring his grace into your lives and by helping you to become the beautiful people he intends you to be.

This evening, however, I wish to speak particularly to your teachers and head teachers and to all those responsible for your education. And so let us return to the Gospel that we have just heard in order to reflect on its significance for all those involved in Catholic education in this country.

Jesus is in Nazareth, the place where He was brought up. He has been away for some time, and in that time He has become quite well known as a teacher and healer. Now He is back home in familiar surroundings, among familiar people – family, friends and acquaintances.

On the Sabbath Day, as was His custom, He joins the people in the synagogue, as he has done ever since He was a boy. He is even invited to proclaim the reading, perhaps by the same Rabbi who had taught Him to read as a young man. The words he proclaims are from the book of the Prophet Isaiah, originally spoken over five centuries before to the Jewish people exiled in Babylon. They are words of comfort and encouragement, promising the people that God would

come to their rescue. They are words familiar to all gathered there on that Sabbath day in Nazareth. Words of hope spoken to their forefathers.

Yet this time it is different. Having entered into common and familiar surroundings, Jesus gives these ancient words a new meaning and a new relevance. He applies them directly to Himself: “These words are being fulfilled even as you listen.” They are no longer words spoken in the past and pointing to an unfulfilled hope sometime in the future. Rather, by applying them to himself, Jesus makes them a message of hope for the present. God is *here* in our midst, and not as an outsider, but as ‘one of us’. This is the centre of our Faith, the meaning of the Christian mystery of the *Incarnation*: that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God has *taken flesh* and dwells among us.

And the Son of God has never ceased to dwell among us ever since those early days in Nazareth, because he continues to be present in the world, to address His Word to us and to invite a response precisely in the Church which is his body upon earth.

Sometimes, however, it is hard for us, and for so many people of this generation, to recognise Christ’s presence in the Church today. We are like those people of Nazareth, many of whom could not accept Jesus as the Son of God because He was too familiar to them. They needed to look at him with the fresh eyes of faith in order to see who He really was. Perhaps, we too need to look afresh with the eyes of faith at the many and even audacious ways that Jesus is speaking to us and present to us in the life and ministry of the Church. He is present in her teachings, in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments and most of all in the Eucharist. He is also present through the ‘members’ of His Body, the Church – He is present in those who are Baptized. Indeed, when we are Baptized we become ‘*alter Christus*’, ‘other Christs’ for we are anointed with the same Holy Spirit with which Jesus was anointed. In all of these many ways, and in each one of us, Jesus is reaching out to every generation to give His gift of the fullness of life. And through each one of us, He wants to reach out to the next generation and give to them the gift of a full life.

Here the Catholic School is vitally important. Many of you work so hard in your schools. You face many problems and difficulties and yet also reap many blessings and joys in the formation of new generations of children. This is fine and rewarding work, and I would like to thank you all, head teachers, teachers and staff, for the immense good that you accomplish.

Yet, with all the demands of the curriculum and so many other pressing needs, it is good sometimes to look at the Catholic School afresh with the eyes of faith, just as it is good to look at Christ and the Church as a whole in this way. The

Catholic School is a crucial component of the Church's ministry to be a place of encounter with Jesus, the Saviour who gives us the fullness of life. Our schools can be this place of encounter, for in them, if they are truly Catholic, Jesus is waiting to welcome and bless our children. He will do this through the teachers, the staff, the chaplaincy teams, the sacraments, the teaching of the Faith, the many campaigns of support for charitable causes, the pastoral care we offer each child and their families. Each of us is an instrument of the presence of Jesus. He came to serve, not to be served. By your service, you give children the wonderful opportunity to grow up with Jesus. He wants to be involved in their lives. He asks each of us to help Him in this.

This, then, is the task and mission of the Catholic school, and the particular mission of each one who works in the Catholic school: to create a place where children can meet Christ and grow up guided by the teaching of His loving truth. The Catholic School is a unique but essential opportunity to hand on the gift of the fullness of life which Jesus offers to the next generation. We are called to help children see that their lives will only find true happiness if it is lived in union with Christ.

If we begin to see the role of the Catholic School in this way, with the fresh eyes of faith, then we will see why the Person of Jesus needs to be placed at the centre of every school. He becomes the model and teacher of us all. The example of His life and His teachings are intended to be the model which inspires every aspect of school life. These are Christian values; they are the values of the Church. The teachings, sacraments and life of the Church embody them because the Church embodies Christ. They have the inner power to inspire and form each student in all that is good, true and beautiful. They touch not just religious teaching, but all areas of the curriculum – from sports to science to art, every area of study and knowledge matters to Christ. Indeed, they affect the whole school – not just how teachers and staff deal with students, but also how teachers and staff deal with each other.

If a School maintains this Catholic vision then it will be successful in the unique task of forming children who will contribute to the good of society around them. Our society throughout Europe suffers many problems of fragmentation – poverty, racism, materialism, lonely individualism, the breakdown of families are but a few signs of this. A new generation of Catholic students, formed in the love and truth of Christ who came to give the fullness of life, will become servants of unity in the midst of this fragmentation. The idea that Catholic Schools are dangerous because they promote segregation can be disproved by forming young people who will become model citizens, agents of unity, promoters of true human well-being – but they will only be able to do this if they are imbued with Christ, one with Him, formed by His teaching and true

friends of His. They are the future. It is your role to help them build that future in Christ.

Today then is a good day for us to look afresh at our wonderful schools. By making them places of encounter with Christ we are really serving our children, their families and our society as well. We are building for the future. So I would encourage you, in your school communities, to try to enable in every way possible that Catholic teachings are taught, that the Scriptures are read, that the Sacraments are celebrated and that the most holy Eucharist is ever present.

And then I would ask you to do what I ask myself and every Christian to do: to try to live united with Christ. In this way you can be His witnesses, His apostles in the daily lives of children. You are present to them bringing stability, patience and understanding as they investigate God's creation, as they explore what it is to be truly human and as they discover who they are, what gifts they have and what a wonderful plan God has for them. As teachers you are in a privileged place to be able to touch and nurture young lives. The Church needs you. Our children need you. Our society needs you. I know that sometimes the challenges are great, but great too are the rewards. Christ will help you as you seek to cultivate the minds of children, as you care for their physical well-being, as you model and foster wholesome relationships, and as you support the development of their spiritual lives. You are teachers on behalf of Christ – He loves you and will be with you in all your work.

In Nazareth Christ was able to say to His listeners, "These words are being fulfilled even as you listen." Today, through your ministry and service, through your life and example, through your lips, He is able to speak to the young people of Scotland, "These words are being fulfilled even as you listen."

Yours is a wonderful vocation. It is one that the Church highly values and cannot do without. Once again, thank you, each of you, for responding so generously to God's call.

Seeing you all here, I am confident that the voice of Christ will never go silent in Scotland when there are people of your heart and generosity ready to serve Him. May God bless you all in your great work.