

Archbishop's Dinner

Hyatt Regency Hotel

25 October 2012

Brother Bishops; Reverend Fathers, Sisters and Brothers; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Before sharing some remarks, I want to thank John Nixon not only for his kind introduction but for agreeing to the taxing task of telling a few jokes. I am, as you know, not so good at that – and John willingly agreed to my plea at outsourcing. Thanks, John, for keeping us amused on this wonderful evening. Indeed, I am grateful to all of you for your presence here tonight, in numbers far exceeding my wildest expectations, let alone my dreams. What a wonderful sign you are of the vigour, enthusiasm and faith that mark the Archdiocese of Vancouver!

It is not a duty but a pleasure to thank you for joining me in this, the first Annual Archbishop's Dinner. I am especially grateful to our patrons and sponsors listed in your program, and for those who, unable to be with us, have made generous donations of support. My thanks, too, go to all the volunteers who have shared in the preparations for this evening. Each one of you deserves to be mentioned by name, but time prevents this gesture. Know, however, that I express not only my own heartfelt gratitude to you but that of all the priests, consecrated women and men and lay faithful of the Archdiocese.

It is this witness of yours, as well as your prayers, that truly give substance to St. Augustine’s telling observation which I wish to make it my own. This is what the great Saint once said about his ministry as a bishop: “Where I’m terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. For you, I am a bishop; with you, after all, I am a Christian. . . and thus while toiling away at my own proper office, I take my [consolation] rest in the marvellous benefit conferred on all of us in common.”¹

A Bit of History: From 1962 to 2012

Now I would like to invite you to remember the past of our Archdiocese with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to and shape our future with confidence in divine Providence.²

Since the past of the Church in this corner of British Columbia includes more than 150 years of history, I am lopping off more than a century – for which you should be thankful! – and will take as my point of departure a more manageable fifty years ago. This is not an arbitrary choice.

Just two weeks ago, we celebrated the opening of the Second Vatican Council by Blessed John XXIII, an event whose idea came to

¹ St. Augustine, *Sermon* 340, 1: *PL* 38, 1483.

² Cf. Blessed John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 1.

him, he said, “like a flash of heavenly light.”³ On that occasion, our present Holy Father recalled that opening day at which he was present as young priest, saying, “we were sure that a new springtime for the Church was coming, a new Pentecost, with a new strong presence of the liberating grace of the Gospel.”⁴

Truly Vatican II has been “the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century,”⁵ and promises to be for the beginning decades of this century as well. Its teaching remains for us the compass by which we can take our bearings in proclaiming the Gospel to the world.

After the Council, the winds of change blew through the Church. Most, but not all, were of the Holy Spirit. For those who can recall, winds also blew through Vancouver. The day after the opening, Hurricane Frieda wreaked enormous damage in Greater Vancouver, with gusting winds of 125 kilometres per hour.⁶ With its typical resilience, the City recovered, emerging more beautiful and prosperous than before.

Some Statistics

Where were we then, five Popes and six Bishops ago – and can

³ Blessed John XXIII, Opening Address at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962).

⁴ Benedict XVI, Address at the Torchlight Procession (11 October 2012).

⁵ Blessed John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57.

⁶ Cf. Chuck Davis, *The Chuck Davis History of Metropolitan Vancouver* (Vancouver, Harbour Publishing Co., 2011), 309.

you name them all in order? – and where are we today? What has happened here in our Archdiocese in this half-century?

Most astonishing, perhaps, is the astounding demographic growth of our local Church in the last half-century. Fifty years ago, there were fewer than 120,000 Catholics in the Archdiocese, about 13% of the total population. Today, we are over 465,000, 17.5% of the total.

The other side of the coin of this growth is that back then there were about 750 of the faithful for every priest. Today that ratio has trebled: we now have one priest for every 2,200 Catholics. During the same period, the number of women Religious has declined nearly four-fold: from about 450 to 109 today.

But I don't want to leave you unduly concerned by these statistics. There is indeed more good news. The Archdiocese has blessedly become truly multicultural and multiethnic in the last fifty years, due especially to immigration from Asia. Now, more than ever, we manifest the Church's catholicity. We are like the people described in the Book of Revelation, coming "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9), yet united by one shared faith.

Moreover, in just the last two years, we have welcomed four new communities of Sisters who are working in our parishes, schools and Downtown Eastside. And we have been blessed with the magnificent new Queen of Peace Monastery in the Upper Squamish Valley. With

the Poor Clares and Benedictine Monks at one end of the Archdiocese, and the Dominican nuns at the other, we are embraced by these arms of prayer, for it is from these spiritual oases that we draw our strength.

And Vancouver has also experienced a near explosion in the number of the new ecclesial movements which have taken root here and are thriving: Couples for Christ with all its various sections, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Focolare, Cursillo, Faith & Light, L'Arche, Worldwide Marriage Encounter, the Neocatechumenal Way, Communion and Liberation, El Shaddai, BLD – and this is not a complete list. To these movements must be added the spiritual renewal of lay people fostered by our Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Jesuits, Madonna House Apostolate and others. What a source of hope for the Archdiocese these vital groups are – and what life they give to our parishes!

Also truly remarkable and distinctive is the fact that, while in many parts of Canada the number of parishes has grown smaller, here we have added 11 parishes since 1962, now numbering 77 – and, with few exceptions, they have grown larger, and many even very much larger.

A similar story can be told of our schools, whose establishment owes so much to the Religious women who founded them and kept them alive by their determination and dedication. In 1962, there were 31 elementary schools and 3 high schools in the Archdiocese. Today, fifty

years later, and with the help of partial government funding for which so many of you fought so hard to obtain under the leadership of Archbishop Carney, we have 49 schools, with the newest one, St. Matthew's, opening just last month. Together they enrol 15,700 students – the largest number ever. This makes our system the largest independent school district in the Province.

In the area of higher education, to St. Mark's College, still in its infancy in 1962, but now significantly expanding its graduate education opportunities, we have added the bold initiatives of Redeemer Pacific College and Corpus Christi College, both of which offer undergraduates a grounding in the Catholic intellectual tradition, which allows us to engage in an informed way in the dialogue between faith and contemporary culture.

Building on the great legacy of numerous congregations of Religious women, in Providence Health Care we now have one of the largest – and certainly I can say the best – faith-based health care organizations in Canada. Operating 16 sites in the Archdiocese, compassionate care is provided to the sick and suffering, and residential care to countless seniors. For all of us, a great grace indeed.

You know well the tremendous amount of infrastructure that you have sacrificed to build in these years: new churches, halls, schools and rectories. Among my happiest days as a bishop are those when I bless or

dedicate a new church, monastery, parish centre school, or rectory. All this has been accomplished with enormous sacrifices on your part. The Lord has been good, very good, to us, and for this we owe him our profound gratitude.

And, lest you think that your generosity extends only to works within the Archdiocese, as it does in Project Advance, I'm proud to tell you how very generous you are in supporting the Church throughout the world: the charities of the Holy Father, the Holy Land, home and foreign missions, Development and Peace and, above all, in helping those who have suffering from natural disasters and tragedies of all kinds. Our collection to help the earthquake victims in Haiti was \$1.4 million, second only to Toronto – the Archdiocese's largest single collection ever. And our recent collection to feed the starving in famine-ravaged West Africa came in at nearly \$350,000; it was, by far, the largest amount offered by any diocese in Canada.

As the faithful of the Archdiocesan family, you certainly have much to be proud of and to thank the Lord for – and not only for your spirit of generosity and solidarity, but also for placing your many different gifts at the service of Christ and the Church. Some of you feed the hungry and clothe the naked, as you do in the Downtown Eastside or in your parish neighbourhoods; others of you visit the incarcerated and support them after their release; countless of you visit the sick and offer

comfort in hospitals, seniors' residences and other facilities. Yet others of you work with the homeless, street youth, recently arrived immigrants and migrants, as well as with the mentally and physically challenged, abused women and those in need of healing and care. And still others teach in our schools, in PREP, RCIA and in adult education classes.

As a community of faith, the Archdiocese overflows with gifts that are being responsibly stewarded and returned to God with gratitude.

Year of Faith

But now, fifty years after the Council's opening, the Lord is also calling each of us to another mission – one, I think, which is even closer to his heart. During this Year of Faith, he is inviting us to deepen and live more coherently the faith of our Baptism, the faith which we are proud to profess in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Our Church, then, is about a great deal more than statistics. It is about people, about a people of faith – faith in God and the salvation he offers us through his Son. It is about the call to holiness, about lives lived in adoration and praise, in charity and justice, in forgiveness and truth, and in steadfast witness and courageous proclamation.

The simplest and most fundamental lesson of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict has said, “is that Christianity in its essence consists in faith in God, who is Trinitarian Love, and in a personal and communal encounter with Christ who orients and guides our lives.

Everything else follows from this. The important thing today . . . is that we see clearly and anew that God is present, that he is watching over us, that he responds to us.”⁷

The Year of Faith which we are now celebrating points us to this most central teaching of Vatican II: an authentic spiritual renewal which is “faith in Christ, . . . animated by the inner desire to communicate Christ to individuals and all people, in the Church’s pilgrimage along the pathways of history.”⁸

Challenges for the Future

Where is the pathway of history pointing us as an Archdiocese? What is ahead for us on our pilgrim way in the coming years? What challenges are facing us as a community of faith?

Because we are rooted in Christ and his Church, we have a sense of direction, energy and enthusiasm. The duty of the Universal Church in any age, and so it is also for our local Church, is to read the “signs of the times”; that is, to discern the particular challenges, possibilities and difficulties that confront it in living and proclaiming the Good News. Then, after prayerful discernment and nourished by the Word of God and the sacramental life of the Church, it must attempt to meet those challenges.

⁷ Benedict XVI, General Audience (10 October 2012).

⁸ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Year of Faith (11 October 2012).

1. Building Up the Infrastructure of the Church

When St. Francis of Assisi was praying before a crucifix in the rundown church of San Damiano, he heard the voice of the Lord, asking him to rebuild his house falling into ruin. Thinking that this meant the building itself, Francis brought his companions to repair the structure. But, over the course of time, he came to realize it was not just the building itself that God was asking him to repair. The Lord was really telling him something much more challenging. He was asking young Francis to renew the life of the Church. Is it not the Lord's call to our Archdiocese to do both? To be renewed in our faithfulness to the Gospel and also to provide for those very real buildings in need of repair?

Truth be told, in the years ahead we shall have a tremendous amount of rebuilding to do of our schools, churches and other facilities, ensuring that they are structurally safe and secure. This undertaking, as you can well imagine, will take a great amount of patience, creativity and resources.

Moreover, God willing, there will be new projects as well: new schools and growing our post-secondary colleges, so that the Catholic formation of lay men and women can keep pace with our rapidly changing world. We need educated laity who are truly ready to assume their rightful role as those who are "co-responsible," together with the

clergy, for the Church's mission of the Church. Recognizing the challenge of this new model of working together, the Holy Father pointed out this past August, "co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church."⁹

Besides needs in the sphere of education, it is also time to revitalize our Cathedral facilities with a Catholic Centre in the midst of downtown Vancouver. Such an initiative would enable people to have a suitable place to gather for meetings not only for parishioners but also for the numerous Catholic organizations in the Archdiocese: from the Catholic Physicians' League to the newly formed Thomas More Society for lawyers and the Association of Catholic Business Leaders. And, in the years ahead, we will have a new and expanded hostel with accompanying services, and I also look forward to improving our facilities so as better to meet the needs of the people of the Downtown Eastside.

2. Fostering a Culture of Vocation

Another challenge we face is that of fostering a culture of vocation: that each one of us, regardless of our state of life, is called to holiness. At the Archdiocesan level, this will entail giving greater emphasis to supporting marriage and family life by renewing our

⁹ Benedict XVI, Message on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action (10 August 2012).

marriage preparation courses, by providing couples with training in NFP and by helping families in times of difficulty and trial.

As I mentioned earlier, the number of priests available to lead parish communities and to serve as chaplains in our schools, health-care facilities and prisons has not kept pace with the growth in the Catholic population. The newly-established Permanent Diaconate Program, with its eighteen candidates now engaged in the study of theology and looking towards Ordination in three years, is a great blessing for the Archdiocese. Deacons complement, but cannot replace, the ministry of our faithful and zealous priests.

We all need to encourage vocations to the priesthood, to pray for them, and to support both our seminarians in their years of formation and our priests in their daily ministry. I am convinced that a true sign of the vitality of a parish and a diocesan community is how seriously it takes its obligation to call forth vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life from its own ranks. I urge each of you to pray even more fervently that the good Lord will grant this favour to our local Church.

3. Call to the New Evangelization

Now the third and final challenge.

You have all heard the word “evangelization” now that it has, *Deo gratias*, worked its way into Catholic vocabulary, though it has taken

many years to get it there.

More than looking to those not yet Christian – although that is always important – our particular challenge in the Archdiocese is the new evangelization. It aims at our brothers and sisters who have been baptized into the Body of Christ but are no longer nourished by the sacramental life of the Church: those who “have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life.”¹⁰

I would estimate that 1/4 million baptized Catholics among us are no longer practising their faith with any regularity. You know them yourselves; they are not distant from you. They are your children, your spouses, your grandchildren, your nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters, friends and co-workers.

We cannot simply accept this as a fact about which we can do nothing. Here is the challenge for you: to reach out to them, with kindness and gentleness, attentive to their difficulties and their pain; to welcome them back with open arms to Christ who is their life.

The Synod of Bishops, which is now meeting in Rome, reminds us that the Lord desires this evangelizing mission, and that each one of us has a part to play in it. We must reach out in a way that is a genuine, loving invitation for them to encounter once again the God who loves them.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Synod (7 October 2012).

By the witness of your joyful life and the kindness of your invitation, you are not imposing on them. On the contrary; you are leading them to rediscover living their faith, that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life. Show them the beauty of the Gospel and lead them to rediscover their taste for the word of God and for the sacraments, especially for the bread of life, the Eucharist.

As you all know, to help us in this reaching out to our brothers and sisters, the Archdiocese, the first one in Canada, has partnered with Catholics Come Home, to give a boost to our individual efforts. It will do this by a media campaign which is to be aired on local television in the Christmas season and new year. I am delighted that Tom Peterson, the founder of this great work has taken us under his wing and is with us here tonight. He has been tireless in helping us with this initiative, and I am very, very grateful for his assistance to us.

Now I would like to give you a taste of what these commercials will look like. Could you please dim the lights?

Thank you. Weren't they wonderful – and touching? The first time I saw the longer one, “Epic,” I admit to tears in my eyes: just thankful to God for calling me to the Church and grateful for all that he

accomplishes through Christ in her.

It is the funding of commercials such as these that will be aired over 1700 times within the Archdiocese that you are helping us with tonight by your presence and your generosity.

My time is up – and, as usual, I’m running a little over. But, before handing the microphone over to John Nixon for the closing chuckle he promised he would have, I want once again to thank you for your support of me, of the Archdiocese and of our project which, we pray, will open wide once again the door of faith for many in our midst.

And may our new Saint, Kateri Tekakwitha, watch over you with all the gentleness that is hers, and in his mercy may God richly bless all of you and your families. Thank you and good night.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB

Archbishop of Vancouver