



Pastoral Letter to the People of the Archdiocese of Edmonton

Dear Faithful People in Christ,

In St. Paul's first letter to the Christian community at Corinth he speaks beautifully of the wonderful diversity of gifts given to the Church for the service of God and His people: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." (*1 Corinthians* 12: 4-6.) We celebrate on Pentecost Sunday the bestowal of the Holy Spirit to the Church and the gifts He instills in the disciples of Jesus Christ. I give God thanks for what is truly a wonderful variety of charisms and good works among the faithful of the Archdiocese of Edmonton. From the Christian witness I have encountered during my first year as your Archbishop, it is clear that many of you have been touched and transformed by the beauty of the Gospel. Through this letter I wish to thank you for your wonderful service to the Church. At the same time I wish to invite you to participate in an important initiative by which we can share with others the joy that we have found in our encounter with Jesus Christ.

Our parishes are led by dedicated priests, who are my principal collaborators in my mission as Shepherd of this Archdiocese. From the time of my installation as Archbishop, they have welcomed me warmly and expressed in a variety of ways their readiness to work with me in the service of the Gospel. Called by Christ to collaborate with the Bishop in the teaching, sanctification and governance of God's holy people, they are entrusted with a task that is both joyful and challenging. I am grateful for their presence and ministry in our local Church.

Many communities of religious women and men serve here in the Archdiocese. Their very presence among us, with their witness of total consecration to Christ and the Church, is a beautiful and necessary sign of the self-emptying love of Christ that brought us life. We recognize with gratitude all that we have received from the self-offering of countless sisters, brothers and priests in religious life.

A constant source of encouragement and edification for me is the enthusiasm that many of our lay people have for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout the past twelve months I have been an appreciative eyewitness to the service of lay women and men in our parishes, Archdiocesan offices and consultative bodies, schools, hospitals and associations. In many ways they give convincing witness to their faith in Christ. A particularly effective testimony is offered in the loving care extended to people in need. Through the outreach of our institutions and various parish-based initiatives, Christian love embraces immigrants, the homeless, families in difficulty, people suffering from addictions, troubled youth, women or men in need of protection, prisoners, and the sick. By means of partnership with parishes and associations abroad, we are reaching out to brothers and sisters in other countries who have a particular need for concrete help. A variety of groups serve the cause of life and thereby give wonderful and necessary witness to the dignity and sanctity of human life from its beginning to natural end.

An especially exciting gift of God to the Archdiocese at this time in our history is the opportunity to construct a new seminary and theological college. We have been blessed with the responsibility of creating a new home for our seminarians and an educational and formative environment for them and for lay students of theology. Many are involved in this project. The gift of their competence, professionalism and enthusiasm assures me of the success of this endeavour. From the many conversations on this topic, it is clear that the people of this Archdiocese appreciate the great opportunity we have to build something whose beauty will testify to that of our faith for years to come. Please keep this project in your prayers.

We are deeply aware, of course, that Christ is Head of His Church and that, apart from Him we can do nothing (cf. *John* 15: 5). Therefore let us give thanks to our Lord, who has richly blessed this Archdiocese through the Holy Spirit He sends from the Father. At the same time let us with confidence turn to Him in prayer for the particular gifts we need to face the challenges that lie before us.

Our fundamental call and challenge is the proclamation of the Gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ is a message of real hope, since it communicates the truth of God's all-powerful love, unveils the dignity and destiny of His children, and assures us of the liberating presence of the Lord in the circumstances of our lives. It falls to us to announce that hope to the men and women of our day, who need to hear and appropriate it for the transformation of their lives. For this reason Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have summoned us, together with the whole Church, to a *new evangelization*. The Church exists to evangelize, that is, to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We have done so from the beginning. By "new" is meant the discerning of fresh and effective ways to be renewed in our love and knowledge of the Lord, and to make Jesus known in our day so as to invite others to find in Him the source of real hope and the way to the fullness of life.

That everyone in this Archdiocese might embrace this call with joy and enthusiasm, I am announcing today an initial five-year process for the new evangelization in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. In this time we shall rediscover together the beauty of knowing Jesus Christ and the rich treasury of faith that comes to us from the Apostles. This renewal in the love of Christ and the faith of the Church will, by the grace of God, inspire us to new ways of sharing this good and life-giving news with the men and women of our day.

Beginning this Fall, each of the five years will be devoted to reflection upon a particular dimension of our faith. The centre of it all, of course, will be the Person of Jesus Christ. Our hope and prayer will be to encounter Him anew as Son of God and Saviour. To prepare the way, we shall begin in the first year with reflections upon the *mystery of the human person*, created by God and saved in Jesus Christ. The second year will then be directed to a *new proclamation of Jesus*, who alone is the answer to the questions and the fulfillment of the hopes of human life. This will be followed by a year dedicated to *the Church*, understood and lived as the mystery of communion in Christ. Our fourth year will focus upon the *life of grace*, that is, life lived as a disciple of Jesus Christ guided by the Holy Spirit. Finally we shall reflect upon the *mission of the Church*, called to witness before the world to the truth of God's love revealed in Christ. Speakers and witnesses will be invited to present the doctrine of the Church in all of its radiance and testify before us to the beauty of the life of faith. Everyone in the Archdiocese will have an opportunity to hear these presentations and to consider how the Lord is calling each of us to a rebirth of hope and joy.

The title I have given to this endeavour is "***Nothing More Beautiful ...***" These words are borrowed from Pope Benedict XVI, who, in his homily at the Mass to inaugurate his ministry as the Successor of St. Peter, said: "*There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.*" My prayer is that, through our reflection together upon the great treasure of our faith, we shall encounter anew the person of Jesus Christ and thus be inspired to share the good news of His love with all in need of hope.

There are many aspects of our society that cry out for this hope. Think, for example, of those uprooted from their families to find employment here at this time of economic growth; of the many people anxious and worried about the lack of affordable housing; or of others caught in the false promises of gambling and other forms of addiction. Never far from our minds and hearts are the many young people, even within our own schools, who do not yet know the Lord and the joy of life in His Church. In order to bring to these and others the good news of the Gospel, we ourselves need to be seized once again by its beauty. Our embracing of the new evangelization, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, will make this possible.

More details will be given in the Fall. For now, I invite you to pray often to the Holy Spirit for the success of this project. May He lead us anew to an encounter with Christ, in whom we see the Father and are truly satisfied (cf. *John* 14: 8-11).

I am deeply grateful to the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful of this local Church. In many ways I have encountered in you a love for the Lord and His Church that inspires your committed service of God's people and gives me great hope. From this I am confident that we shall embrace with enthusiasm the call to proclaim anew the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



✠ Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton

Edmonton, Solemnity of Pentecost, May 11, 2008