



To all the lay faithful of our Archdiocese

Rome, 8 October 2018

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Last Saturday I was delighted to be with so many of you at a conference in Edinburgh organised by our newly formed Commission for Catechetics on “*The Role of the Laity*”. By any measure, the conference was a great success. It was attended by nearly 400 people and viewed by another 7,000 on social media. It was a wonderful opportunity to reflect together on this vitally important subject: The apostolate of the laity. As our principal source of teaching and guidance we took the Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on the Lay Apostolate*, which I encourage you all to read. It can be found easily on the Vatican web site.

The word “apostolate” means more than just a job or a function. An “apostle” is someone who is sent out on a mission with authority and power from the one who sends them. After he had risen, Jesus himself said to the Apostles: “As the Father sent me so I am sending you” (John 20:21). Through them he was also speaking to everyone who is baptised – for we all share in the saving mission of Jesus according to our state in life and our part in the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church.

Priests do this in a particular way, especially by offering Mass, celebrating the Sacraments and by public preaching. But through Baptism and Confirmation every single member of the People of God is commissioned and sent to bring Christ to the world.¹ Being a baptised Christian already means being an Apostle of Christ.

The role of all lay people is, therefore, to preach Christ by their actions as well as their words, by the presence and the witness of their lives, by the Faith they believe and the values they hold. In these ways the laity permeate society with the grace and truth of Christ. Needless to say, in this way also, the laity can and do bring Christ to people in ways and in places that priests and religious cannot reach: in homes, in workplaces, in the political sphere and in social settings.

The Council document reminds us that to do this we must be holy ourselves.² For we are called to sanctify this fallen world by our lives (Ephesians 5:16).

This is the primary vocation of our Baptism. Through Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit who empowers us to act as the Lord’s apostles in the world. When we are confirmed, this grace is strengthened so we can actively share in the Church’s mission. The Holy Spirit

¹ Second Vatican Council: Dogmatic Constitution on the Nature of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 33.

² Second Vatican Council: Decree on the Lay Apostolate, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

gives every baptised person, each one of us, an apostolate – that is the inspiration and power to do something definite for God in our own unique way.

We must not, therefore, be tempted to reduce the apostolate of the laity to the performance of inner Church roles or purely liturgical functions. For, important though these are, the primary apostolate of all lay Christians is to evangelise their fellow women and men and make them holy - and in this way to be a leaven in the midst of the world.³

We cannot promote an authentic lay apostolate by undermining the unique sacramental role of the priesthood. Nor should we. For lay and priestly ministries are not in competition. Rather the roles of both the laity and the clergy are profoundly complementary. And, of course, we need more of both: holy people and holy priests working together, hand in hand, for the Lord.

In a sense, the Church is a “family of families”. So, a healthy Church has a multitude of lay groups and initiatives, whether parish-based or organised on a diocesan, national or international basis, which collaborate in building the Church and spreading the Gospel.

All ministry is collaborative, and as your bishop, I value very highly the competence and expertise of the many lay people and organisations that are crucial to the spiritual, evangelical, catechetical, pastoral, social, financial, and practical running of the Archdiocese. And we should not forget that young people too have a powerful and irreplaceable role in evangelising, especially other young people.

All God's people have a right and a duty to play their part in the life of the Church. It doesn't matter whether our contribution is through high profile projects or in quiet acts of virtue and charity. What counts in God's eyes is purity and generosity of heart. And if we are to be effective apostles, it is crucial for all of us — bishop, clergy and people — to be united, mind and heart, in the full truth of the Catholic faith and in the life of grace.

Whatever our role in God's family, all our efforts and offerings must be brought back and united to the one perfect Sacrifice of Jesus on the altar at Sunday Mass. This is the source and the summit of our Christian life and of the entire lay apostolate. We should remember too that our place in heaven will not be determined by any earthly rank or status, but by how closely we have come to resemble Jesus in obedience and charity. Asking Our Lady, a lay woman, Queen of Heaven and Mother of The Church, to intercede for us all, I remain

Yours in Christ Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Leo Cushley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Leo Cushley
Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh

³ Second Vatican Council: Decree on the Lay Apostolate, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* par. 2