



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Homily : Archdiocese of Dhaka Anniversary Solemn Mass  
*Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor*

9 NOVEMBER 2012, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

**It is with abundant joy that I come among you as the representative of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate the 125th year of the foundation of this great Diocese of Dhaka and to remember 400 years of Christian faith here in this land. The Holy Father has asked me to assure you that he shares deeply with you the joy of these celebrations and, in particular, he extends his warmest greetings to you all: to the Archbishop of Dhaka and the Bishops, as well as to the priests, religious men and women and all of you, lay men and women who are the Catholic Church in this land.**

During my all too brief visit here, I have had the joy of meeting with different groups of people within the Catholic Church, and with representatives from your Government, along with people of other religions, those from overseas who live and work among you, and our other Christian brothers and sisters. I have experienced the sounds and sights of this vibrant city and have been enthralled by all I have seen; and perhaps even been a little afraid of the traffic!

Such a great diversity of peoples, charisms and cultures is a profound reflection that you live in a land where the freedom of religion and expression is recognised and is celebrated in your Constitution. Our Holy Father himself was able to speak of this with your Prime Minister when she kindly visited him in the Vatican in November 2009. During that memorable visit Pope Benedict commended all the efforts in Bangladesh to promote a society that is ever more open to, and respectful of, the human rights of all its citizens. So on this great occasion when we remember the historic roots of the foundations of our Christian faith in this land, on behalf of the Holy Father and in the name of the Catholic Church here in Bangladesh, I wish to recognise publicly the initiatives undertaken by the present Government during these years, and say that we look forward to our cordial relations continuing and coming to fruition.

I have been pleased to see and to learn how within the Catholic Church you too live in openness to your fellow citizens. I heartily admire the Church here in Bangladesh, under the guidance of your Archbishop and Bishops, for her steadfast commitment to education. In your determination to be of service to the youngest among you, and in many cases offering schooling to those most in need, you offer a profound example to the Catholic Church in the rest of the world. In so doing you also fulfil the very commandment of Christ proclaimed to us in the Gospel today that all his followers are to preach the Gospel.

You may be small in number, in such a vast throng of people; you may have the challenges of a lack of resources and material wealth, yet you are faithful and for this you are counted among the blessed. You are the mustard seed or the yeast in the dough - seemingly without significance or importance; yet a life-giving presence providing shelter and opportunity for those who seek knowledge and learning in the noble quest to improve their lives and wellbeing.

With special concern for you, Pope Benedict has asked me to inspire you to continue to deepen your Catholic faith and to embolden you to never turn away from the witness by which you show your commitment to God and to the love of His Son, Jesus Christ. I encourage you to take to heart these words of our Holy Father only four weeks ago when he opened the Year of Faith for the whole Church and which will shortly be inaugurated here in Bangladesh: "Today, more than ever, evangelizing means witnessing to new life, transformed by God and thus showing the way".

You are witnesses to new life. This was so evident in the manner with which you provided great assistance following the catastrophic cyclone in November 1970; it is the daily witness given in your Catholic schools, and in the caring witness given in each and every encounter within the hospitals, clinics and dispensaries in the villages; it is and will always be the personal witness seen in steadfastly and resolutely pursuing your beliefs and practices as you live faithful Christian family lives in the midst of many others who do not share your faith.

St. Peter in today's reading reminds all the followers of Christ that we are, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light". Compared with many in the world there is of course darkness in your life and many would see you as poor. Indeed you need and deserve all the help that can be given. And yet, we celebrate today that you have been called over the centuries into the light and life of faith and that you have responded. What a privilege to belong in a special way to a people that is able to worship and to love God in and through Jesus our Saviour. You are members of the universal Catholic family spread throughout the world, a faith which embraces men and women of every race, language, culture and ethnicity. Whatever the challenges you face, remember always that you are the People of God!

Spreading the Gospel requires those who hear and respond to the call to go into the world. The very first disciples did just that. Leaving their homeland and the places where they had walked and talked and listened to the Lord himself, they journeyed and took the Good News with them. You have received the Gospel through the readiness of women and men Religious who came from afar, baptising and bringing the message of salvation. I salute the memory of those first missionaries and with it the Religious sisters, brothers and priests their successors among us now who continue the work of evangelisation.

Above all, I rejoice that there are now many young Bangladeshi women and men ready to take up the call to Religious life and that there are enthusiastic young men ready to respond to the call to the Diocesan priesthood. My young sisters and brothers, you, in your turn can and must be the successors of those from whom you have received the Good News. Do not leave it to others. Be willing and ready to face the challenges of journeying through your own land and through the rest of the world, proclaiming, witnessing and working for the good of the Kingdom. Yes, be instruments of the new evangelization which the world needs so deeply.

In appointing me as his representative, the Holy Father has asked me to stress the loving bonds that unite him with all of you and the spirit of love with which he unites himself with you in the joy of this great celebration. At the end of this Mass, it will be my honour to impart his Apostolic Blessing upon all here present and also to all your loved ones, especially your children and those in your families who are ill. In so doing I make my own, the words of St Peter and give thanks for you all, the living stones building a spiritual house which indeed is acceptable to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor**  
*Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster*