



***UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL DELIVERED***

**43rd Annual Cardinal's Dinner – November 15, 2022  
Address by Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto**

It is so good to be able to be with you all in person this evening as we come together for the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Cardinal's Dinner.

I would like to begin with words of profound gratitude. Thank you to our dinner chair, Joseph Mancinelli; for all that you've done to prepare for this evening and for bringing many new faces to be with us tonight at the dinner. I am grateful to you and the planning team for your tremendous work in preparing for tonight.

I bring greetings to our distinguished head table guests and those with us tonight representing leadership in the religious, political, corporate, and community sectors.

A special welcome to the many leaders from other faith communities. I am grateful for the many opportunities to collaborate and pray together.

I would like to extend greetings to the clergy, religious men and women, and parishioners from across the Archdiocese of Toronto. Be assured of my deep gratitude for your faithfulness and perseverance.

**Social Services/Education/Health Care**

Over the years the Cardinal's Dinner has raised more than \$6 million to support important charitable work. Along with our annual appeal, ShareLife, which this year has raised \$12 million to date, we continue to support the work of our Catholic social service agencies in reaching out to all of those in need. Thank you for your generosity, especially in these difficult economic times.

Special thanks to all those here this evening who are involved in education. From St. Augustine's Seminary to Catholic post-secondary institutions and private Catholic schools; and of course, we are so grateful to the faithful educators engaged in publicly funded Catholic Education. I also thank the provincial government for their continued support of the system.

In a particular way, I want to acknowledge the incredible efforts of front-line health care workers over the last number of years; this includes all those working in Catholic Health Care facilities – your dedication in caring for the body, mind and soul of every patient is inspiring.

## **Healing & Reconciliation**

This year, we were blessed to welcome the Holy Father to Canada on a penitential pilgrimage of healing, reconciliation and hope. Pope Francis listened intently to the stories of Indigenous Peoples of this land both in Rome and during his pastoral visit.

We continue to walk together on a journey of reconciliation and healing, which must be guided by a passion for truth, by a listening heart, and by a commitment to love one another with a reverence for the human dignity of each person.

Thank you, Rosella, for being with us tonight and for serving on the Indigenous Reconciliation Fund. I also thank the federal government for their partnership in working on the papal visit as well as the regional efforts of provincial and municipal partners. In a special way, we extend our gratitude to former Premier Kenney for his very significant support of the papal visit in Alberta, as well as for his many years of outstanding public service.

## **Pandemic**

Since we last gathered for this dinner, the world has experienced a global pandemic. Some of you may have been seriously ill, and others lost loved ones to Covid-19. It has been a painful time for all of us.

We continue to pray for those in public office, who over the last few years have had to make difficult decisions each day, trying to navigate through the uncertainty of the pandemic.

For many months, I celebrated Mass each day in an empty Cathedral with a virtual congregation. Those days made me think of how much we take for granted how accessible the sacraments usually are for us. Most of us have a parish church within a short walk or drive. Yet there we were, separated from one another, unable to gather in large numbers to worship together.

Yet throughout that painful experience, we also witnessed divine moments of grace, as parish volunteers called or visited hundreds of homes to check in, and as priests offered the Word of God and the Sacraments as best they could in that extraordinary circumstance.

## **Religious Persecution, Ukraine**

As we reflect on the temporary restriction of access to places of worship because of a pandemic in our country, we must not forget that elsewhere in the world violent religious persecution is rampant, more than ever before. In China Muslims and Christians face arrest. The horrible reality of antisemitism is with us to this day. And in so many different parts of the world, Christians suffer and die for their faith. Only recently parishioners in Nigeria were killed as they attended Mass on Pentecost, and the instances of such martyrdom abound throughout the world.

As we observe Red Wednesday next week to remember in a particular way persecuted Christians worldwide, let us pray for all those who are persecuted because of their faith, and do whatever we can to speak against this injustice and to provide support to those who are suffering.

The Archdiocese of Toronto's Office for Refugees continues to help facilitate the sponsorship of those of many different faiths fleeing violence or persecution to find a new home in Canada. I would also like to highlight a new initiative – the need for people in the Archdiocese of Toronto to open their hearts and homes to those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Let us do everything we can to support the people of Ukraine.

### **Faith as Witness in a Secular Society**

But even where there is no active persecution, in most places, especially in Europe and North America, the life of discipleship is lived against a background of materialist ideologies which are antagonistic to the principles which are fundamental for people of faith. As the deadly cloud of euthanasia spreads across our own country, and limitation after limitation drops away, we who affirm the inherent dignity of the human person from the first moment of conception to natural death must come to the realization that we are indeed strangers in a strange land. May we never become a society in which human worth is measured not by the inherent dignity of each person but by productivity, or vigour, or by the ability to exercise the illusion of control. Such a nightmare scenario ultimately leads to discarding the most vulnerable among us.

And so, this evening, I offer to you a few points that come to mind, on how to engage effectively the secular and materialist world in which God has placed us, and in which He has commissioned us to witness with clarity and charity to His truly compassionate love:

### **Go Deep in Prayer and in the Study of Our Faith**

The more the heavy hand of secularism presses upon us, the more must we go deep, in prayer and in the knowledge of our faith. Lately I have been urging Catholics to read each day a chapter of the Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It only takes a few minutes. Under pressure to conform to the materialist world view by which we are all unconsciously influenced, we often are tempted to create a false Jesus who fits smoothly into that world, and who validates accommodation with secular humanism. By reading the actual text of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we can encounter Jesus, the real Jesus, who shakes us out of our complacency, strips away our illusions, and calls each of us to personal conversion, and to the counter cultural heroism of holiness.

We study the wisdom of our faith, using the gift of human reason; we do so in a spirit of prayer, in which we ask for the gift of faith. Faith itself is reasonable, though the truth which it reveals cannot be grasped by those who limit their search for truth to the use of materialist instruments that by definition are inadequate to discover a truth that goes beyond the merely material.

Faith and reason cannot ever contradict one another, and both are needed to find the fullness of truth. There is a marvellous scene at the end of "The Blue Cross", the first and best of the Father Brown detective stories of G. K. Chesterton, in which the criminal Flambeau tries to convince Father Brown that he is a fellow priest. To do that, he attacks reason, but that reveals him to be a fraud, for as Father Brown remarks, attacking reason is bad theology, not a sign of faith.

So we should study our faith, in a spirit of prayer, using the God given instrument of reason to learn more and more about the mysteries of faith, daily exploring the never ending gold mine of spiritual insight. I always recall the story of St Augustine walking on the beach, trying to find a reasonable way of examining the greatest mystery of Christian faith, the innermost reality of God in the trinity. He sees a little boy with a seashell, running back and forth between the ocean and a little hole he has dug in the sand, trying to fill it with the ocean. Augustine says, “Little boy, you can never empty the ocean into that hole with your seashell.” And the little boy replies: and you will never grasp the mystery of the trinity with the seashell of reason. But I am sure both agreed that Augustine should keep on scooping with that useful though limited tool.

The prophetic zeal which allows us to see through the illusions of materialist secularism, and to do battle daily against the evils in society, in the Church, and in our own hearts, can so easily sour into sterile bitterness. That is another reason why a life of prayerful repentance and adoration is essential. If we recognize our own sins, we will be more charitable. If we come daily before God in adoration, we will be more conscious of God’s loving providence, in which we find the joy expressed in the verse from Psalm 100 which I chose as the motto for my ordination as a priest many years ago: “Serve the Lord with gladness, come before him singing for joy.”

### **The Logic of Faith, Hope, and Love; The Witness of Love, Hope, and Faith**

Faith, Hope, and Love: this is the logical order, for faith shows us the vision of God, and allows us to see the unseen context of earthly reality; awareness of that divine context gives us the confident energy of hope; that hope that is the fruit of the vision of faith in turn strengthens us to persevere, no matter what opposition or failure we face, in our acts of practical love. That is the logical order.

But in practice, we must start with love: it is our actions of loving service that speak most powerfully, even in a secular society, to people without faith; perhaps they will touch their hearts, and perhaps eventually lead them to inquire into the foundation of faith that lies beneath the actions of sacrificial love. The wealthy tourist said to the religious sister engaged in serving those afflicted with the most distressing diseases: “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” She replied, “Neither would I.”

### **The Prophet and the Sage**

The prophet speaks visionary words to people of faith: “Thus says the Lord...” For those who already believe in the Lord, that message is powerful indeed. But for those who do not, it is meaningless, for they do not acknowledge the existence of the Lord who speaks.

That is why it is essential that the wisdom tradition complement the prophetic tradition, for the wisdom tradition also speaks to people without faith. The Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, Job, some of the psalms, universally admired portions of the New Testament, such as the parables, and many other scriptural passages, are words of wisdom which are immediately accessible even to people without faith.

They form a bridge to the faithless secular world. The books of wisdom do not majestically say “thus says the Lord...”, but humbly observe “have you noticed this in life?” They can intrigue and convince anyone, with or without faith. And they are works of unsurpassed beauty, human as well as divine.

Beauty touches the heart first of all, and it can lead to a recognition of the truth from which it arises, and then move the heart to embrace the goodness that flows from that truth. Beauty, then truth, then goodness.

The beauty of our liturgy assists us in prayer, as does the wonder of music, for St Augustine says: “the one who sings, prays twice.” That is why the St Michael’s Choir School is an essential element in the life of the Archdiocese of Toronto. But musical or visual beauty can also be the doorway to faith for a secular humanist. The visual beauty of the art and architecture of the Church astonishes and attracts one and all, with or without faith. That is why we went to such great effort and expense not only to prevent our cathedral from falling down, but to make it a place of stunning beauty, to enhance the prayer of the faithful, but also to offer those without faith an oasis of beauty in an anxious and troubled world, and a sign of God’s presence to the citizens of the secular city.

This evening we gather to rejoice in our fellowship, to offer practical assistance to those in need, and to seek guidance and strength for the path ahead through this increasingly perilous valley of tears, joyfully intent on reaching our true home, the heavenly City of God.

I will end with words from my favourite hymn, *O God Beyond All Praising*, which speak of the joyful spirit that marks that journey home:

And whether our tomorrows  
Be filled with good or ill  
We’ll triumph through our sorrows  
And rise to bless you still.  
To marvel at your beauty  
And glory in your ways  
And make a joyful duty  
Our sacrifice of praise.