



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL WINNING ON THE
ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARRIVAL OF
ST NINIAN IN SCOTLAND**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Thomas Winning
Archbishop of Glasgow*

As the Church in Scotland returns in memory to its origins and celebrates the 1600th anniversary of the arrival of St Ninian in Galloway in 397 A.D., I send you cordial greetings in the Lord and ask you to convey to your brother Bishops and to the clergy, religious and lay faithful the assurance of my prayerful participation in this joyous commemoration. The life and apostolate of St Ninian are traditionally considered as marking the introduction of Christianity into your country. This then is a time for all Scottish Christians to give thanks to our heavenly Father who, through his chosen instruments, especially Ninian, Mungo and Columba, caused to shine in your hearts "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (cf. 2 Cor 4:6).

A Briton by birth, Ninian's education was essentially Roman and after his ordination as a Bishop, probably in Rome, he returned to Scotland as its first missionary. His foundation of *Candida Casa* in Galloway in south-west Scotland, later to be known as Whithorn, was the beginning of a vital centre of monastic spiritual life and evangelizing activity which, under Ninian's inspiration, spread the Gospel message northwards and eastwards over much of the country, as witnessed to in so many place-names and local traditions which refer to him.

Ninian's mission to Scotland should be seen as a part of the wider picture of the great missionary enterprises which brought Christianity to every corner of Europe during the first millennium. Now, as we approach the third Christian millennium, we realize that Europe — and Scotland not least — has undergone such cultural, political, social and economic transformations, that a *new evangelization* is necessary and essential. All who consider themselves followers of Christ must

hear the call to a deeper faith and a more convincing witness of Christian living.

Your anniversary celebration is an important moment in the preparation which the whole Church is making for the forthcoming Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Ninian directs you to Christ. It was Christ's message that he preached, Christ's paschal mystery that he made sacramentally present, Christ's Church that he founded on Scottish soil. To remember St Ninian is to recommit yourselves to the evangelizing and sanctifying work to which he devoted his life. In addition, all must feel the urgent need for efforts to speed the process of reconciliation between divided Christians, "so that we can celebrate the Great Jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 34).

May the solemn Mass which on 31 August you will celebrate a short distance from Whithorn, at the mouth of what is called St Ninian's Cave, and which will commemorate the 1600th anniversary of the saint's arrival at this very spot, be an act of fervent thanksgiving for the life and fidelity of the Church in your land since the beginning. May it be an ardent prayer that the time may be shortened for all believers in Christ to be able with one voice to glorify God together (cf. Rom 15:6).

Entrusting Your Eminence, your Brother Bishops and all the faithful of Scotland to the intercession of St Ninian and to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 29 June 1997, the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul.

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