

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
FRIDAY OF THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME  
ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA CHURCH, CINCINNATI, OHIO  
NOVEMBER 6, 2020**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and assure you of his spiritual closeness and heartfelt gratitude as you carry out your vocation as educators here at St. Ignatius of Loyola School and participate in the School of Faith. I personally want to thank you for your efforts during this year, which became complicated and burdened by the global pandemic. Fr. Fernandes has told me of your extraordinary efforts. As we conclude National Vocation Awareness Week, I want to reflect with you upon your vocation as educators.

Yesterday, I conferred the sacrament of Confirmation upon the eighth-grade students. I spoke about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, two of which are understanding and knowledge. Educators must not only develop these gifts in themselves but also must assist young people to develop these gifts.

The gift of *understanding* helps us understand in depth the word of God and the truth of the Faith. Our world is quite superficial and ephemeral. God calls us to be a person of substance and integrity. Young people will take the faith seriously only if they see credible witnesses. In this regard, your role and your vocation are critical – to give coherent witness to the revealed Word of God.

The other gift is that of *knowledge*, not knowledge in the technical sense, as is taught at so well at your school, but knowledge in the deepest sense which teaches a person to find in creation the signs and impressions of God, to understand how God speaks in every age and how He speaks personally, and to inspire daily work with Gospel values. A Catholic school is different from public schools, because it seeks the formation of the whole person, including the spiritual dimension, in an integrated way. We do not educate merely for efficiency but for knowledge that leads to God.

God calls you to grow in understanding and knowledge to lead your students on their journey through life and toward heaven. There is a temptation to provide young people with all the answers to life's problems, and yet, the question is an anthropological one. Chesterton wrote: "They say that the wise don't see the answer to the riddle of reason. The problem is not that the wise don't see the answer. It's that the wise don't see the riddle."

Christ is the answer, but if we don't perceive the question, how can we understand the answer? This is the challenge – modern people, including our children, have lost a sense of their own humanity and with it a sense of the Infinite and of Mystery. The educator, by his or her witness and efforts to accompany students, assists them in discovering their own humanity by provoking questions: What is the meaning of existence? Why is there pain and death? Why is life worth living? What is True? Good? Beautiful? What does reality consist of and for what is it made?

Young people must be guided to engage reality – to engage life and to ask these questions. It is not for us to pre-determine the questions or their answers. They must engage reality. Unless they ask these sorts of questions, they will never encounter the answer: Christ.

The starting point for accompaniment, therefore, is not an argument about what young people should or should not believe or what they should or should not know, but a gaze that communicates to the young person that they are valued and the awareness that the young person must follow a path just as we had to. In the process of accompaniment, we listen and offer our experience and wisdom, attracting them by our fidelity and the witness of our lives.

Naturally, young people will be critical and ask questions, not only the existential questions but also about particular dimensions of the faith. We need to teach them how to think critically and to ask questions, without fear. For our part, we accompany them during this phase of critical inquiry by adhering more faithfully to the Tradition, against which they can, through experience and their encounter with us, test the coherence of the Catholic Faith and verify its truths through reason, faith, and their personal encounter with Christ. Thus, they will learn to accept responsibility, use their freedom, and become protagonists in their future.

I want to say a brief word about coherence. Young people do not expect the parents, clergy, teachers, or youth ministers to be perfect people. God alone is perfect. Nevertheless, they do expect that there would be a correspondence between the faith we profess with our lips and our lives and actions. That is perhaps why the gift of understanding, which leads us beyond the superficial is so important. For if we are not rooted ourselves in the faith and offer poor witness, then the coherence of the Faith as a whole will appear to fall apart in the eyes of young people. St. Paul invites us: *Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.*

As leaders, we must use our authority wisely to mediate the Presence of the One from whom we have our authority. Young people want adults to accompany them and to be present to them. God and the Church call us to help them discern their true good, listening to and taking them seriously. This process demands time, effort and patience, but the investment is worth it.

Additionally, the proposal of the Catholic Faith needs to be attractive. This is God's method: He chooses a person or persons to attract others. We invite the young to follow, even if they are drawn to God along a path that is different from our own, promising them that they too will experience the positive change in their lives that we have had in knowing Christ intimately. We invite them to actually get on the road and to commit themselves to walking the journey (with us). That is, we offer them signs and reminders of His Presence that provoke them to continue the journey and to ask still more questions.

In this regard, our Gospel which deals with the dishonest steward is instructive. The Lord does not commend the steward's dishonesty, rather He commends his prudence. He is clever; he chooses the best way to accomplish his end. A disciple and educator should imitate how a serpent is shrewd; *phronium* is the Greek word used here, and it also means prudent. If the dishonest steward, when asked to give an account, is prudent enough to plan for his earthly future so as to receive a welcome in people's homes, how much more should we, who are called to be "wise and faithful" stewards, prudently plan for our heavenly future to be welcomed into eternal dwellings?!!! St. Paul reminds us in the First Reading that *our citizenship is in heaven.*

In the course of the journey of faith, the student, entrusted to our care, will have to verify whether the Faith, and its promise of eternal life, corresponds to his or her heart's desire. They will have to ask questions. This involves, on our part, taking a risk – the risk of freedom. The young person must be guided

to use his or her freedom along the journey. This is your vocation – to lead and guide them. The Church is counting on you! This takes time and patience. The disciples on the Road to Emmaus only gradually realized who Christ was. We must also acknowledge the risk that they might choose not to follow, just as the rich young man did.

The important thing is to be on the road together – with your pastor, your your principal and vice principal, with your colleagues, and with your students. Faith and discipleship are an adventure, which involves risk-taking. Discipleship is a journey or path for them (and us) to discover that God's promises are true and that this way of life is fulfilling.

The proposal of faith, by facilitating the encounter with Christ, can lead young people to the beautiful, the true, and the good – to the transcendent dimensions of life and eternity. And this is why your vocation as educators is so important: you lead young people to heaven. May God bless each and every one of you as you carry out your noble vocation.