

## Theme Development Day

St. Nicholas

24 May 2018

Dear brother priests, dear colleagues:

### *Introduction*

Today's gathering is for me a sign of the seriousness with which you are taking the task of reinforcing and strengthening the Catholic identity and mission of our schools. And I am very grateful you for your commitment to this vital undertaking.

Having an annual theme for our schools is yet another way of showing your dedication to this goal. I thank you sincerely for working together to find ways of ensuring that this year's theme – what do you want of me, Lord? – comes alive in the fabric of the daily life and activities of our schools. Your creativity in making this happen is deeply appreciated and, I am sure, will bear the kind of enduring fruit of which the Lord speaks in today's Gospel (cf. Jn 15:16).

And what you are doing fits into a wider picture of the universal Church, to which we belong as the great Catholic family spread to every corner of the earth. It corresponds to the movement in the Church, where the upcoming Synod of Bishops in October will focus on young people, the faith and discernment. In its preliminary document, it says that "it is necessary for the Church to examine the way in which it thinks about and engages with young people in order to be an effective, relevant and life-giving guide throughout their lives." Moreover, in his recent

published apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis writes: “The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7)” (n. 11). This, surely, is what we want for those whom we are accompanying in our educational endeavours.

### ***Today’s Reading from Jeremiah***

The reading from the Prophet Jeremiah sets the stage for answering the question of what the Lord wants of us. God called Jeremiah when he was a reluctant young man. What is crucial here is that we see that it is the Lord himself who initiates the call about what we are to do with our lives. God always takes the initiative, the first step. In the Gospel Jesus couldn’t be clearer: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).

We do not just “make ourselves” the “best version of ourselves” – as the seventh graders write to me in their Confirmation letters. Our young people are being called by the Lord himself to do great things. And we should not underestimate that.

When we stress the great potential of our young people, let’s not forget that they will truly develop themselves – become happy and fulfilled human beings – when they answer God’s plan for their life.

Perhaps the first thing to consider in this year's theme is the need to awaken in students that they should consider what their vocation in life really is. Help them to ask that question, and help them direct it to God: "What do *you* want of me, Lord?" So many other voices clamour for their attention and fill them with desires about what will bring them happiness, many of which are false and lead in the wrong direction.

Stimulate your students to ask the question, and not to think they are too young or incapable of finding an answer. "Ask and you shall receive." And encourage them to listen carefully to that still voice within them that might just be calling them to the consecrated life or the priesthood.

The Responsorial Psalm puts it well: the attitude all of us should have and which we want to share with our young people: "Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will."

Pursuing the will of God is not oppressive. It does not cut off good and legitimate options. Nor does it curtail our freedom, which is fulfilled not in leaving open endless options but following what the Lord wants. Jesus takes nothing away from what gives our life meaning. After all, he came to bring us life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

If you get this across to your students, and this year's theme will more than have accomplished its purpose.

## *Gospel*

“I no longer call you servants, but friends” (cf. Jn 15:15). The core of every Christian life is being a friend of Jesus Christ. This is who we are in the depths of our being: Jesus’ friends. We are not merely his servants who obey his commandments, but friends who have been loved: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (Jn 15:9).

In order to do the Lord’s will, we first need to understand that we are loved – and loved unconditionally.

Like all the human friendships we enjoy, the one we have with Jesus is “not a matter of mere intellectual knowledge but of a profound, personal relationship: a knowledge of the heart, of one who loves and one who is loved; of one who is faithful and one who knows how to be trustworthy.”<sup>1</sup> Our friendship with the Lord – and what we want our students to enjoy as well – is not just knowing *about* him through sound catechesis and instruction. It is, above all, about living in communion with him: “I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14).

Friendship entails wanting the same things as good, and rejecting the same things as evil. Friendship is a communion of thinking and willing. Speaking of the central importance of this friendship with the Lord, Pope Benedict said this:

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily for Ordination of Priests of Rome (29 April 2007).

He [God] knows me by name. I am not just some nameless being in the infinity of the universe. He knows me personally. – and then the Pope adds – Do I know him? The friendship that he bestows upon me can only mean that I too try to know him better; that in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in prayer, in the communion of saints, in the people who come to me, sent by him, I try to come to know the Lord himself more and more. Friendship is not just about knowing someone, it is above all a communion of the will. It means that my will grows into ever greater conformity with his will.<sup>2</sup>

We have all been called to friendship, to “abiding” in Christ’s love (cf. Jn 15:10). It is from within this friendship that we will come to know what the Lord wants of us.

### ***Conclusion***

If you direct your students to know the question – what is God’s will for me? – and lead them to find the answer – in friendship with him – this year’s theme will have fulfilled more than we could hope for.

As we continue our celebration let’s pray that all of us will answer with open heart what the Lord wants of us in every aspect of our lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily (29 June 2011).

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