

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
FRIDAY, OF THE 8TH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME, MEMORIAL OF SAINT JUSTIN
NATIVITY: FAITH AND REASON SCHOOL, BROOMFIELD, COLORADO
JUNE 1, 2018

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I am very happy to be with you this morning. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative to the United States, I want to express the spiritual closeness and warm greetings of the Holy Father Pope Francis. I thank the priests, religious, the principal and staff, all the teachers and parents for making this school what it is: a community of faith, in which all are welcomed and can learn about the love of God in light of faith and reason. I thank the students too – for their joy and enthusiasm, especially in building up this community.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them! Then shall all the trees of the forest exult. These words of the responsorial psalm reflect a true spirit of joy – the joy that students always have on the last day of school! ... And yet, these words refer to the presence of the Lord – to his coming to be with His people, to rule them with justice and peace. Yes, we should rejoice that we can be here together. Jesus tells us, *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst."* Yes, this is cause for rejoicing: He is with us. Just as in the Nativity, we celebrate that God is with us as a little Child, so too He remains with His People.

The last day of school gives us a chance to reflect upon where and how God has been in our midst this year. When did you experience God's love? How did your teachers and friends communicate God's love for you? How was Jesus at work in you – in class, on the playground or in sports, or at home with your family? Today we can think about God's presence changes our lives and brings us joy.

God has given us many gifts and blessings through this community, but have we developed them? In our Gospel, Jesus curses the fig tree. He was hungry, and it had no fruit. Jesus hungers for our love. He hungers for justice. You have spent a whole year learning and growing, receiving blessings and graces. Your teachers and parents have helped you along the way. Our first reading from the First Letter of St. Peter urges us: *As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.* How will we serve? What do we have to offer God today? What will we be able to offer Him this summer or next fall?

Jesus Himself wants to serve His Father and to teach His disciples how to offer God fitting worship. In the Gospel, he drives the money-changers from the Temple. He says: *"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. But you have made it a den of thieves."* Many things can distract us from bearing fruit, serving our brothers and sisters, and from praying sincerely to God. Money is just one of them. Jesus wants his disciples to have a pure heart, so that they can focus on what really matters – their relationship with His Father. I know that at the end of the year, students must clean things up. They must clean out their desks and lockers; get rid of trash and junk that has built up throughout the year. Books must be put away and in the right order. Floors must be swept and mopped. A lot of cleaning – of purification – must happen. This makes us ask: What in my heart needs to be cleaned? What "junk" is there taking up space that I could be giving to God or my neighbor?

Yes, Jesus teaches his disciples that what matters most is not money or success, but the love of God. We can use both reason and the gift of faith to know God. Today, the Church remembers Saint Justin, who was born around the year 100. He was a philosopher. He spent a long time seeking the truth, using his reason to study philosophy, but one day he met an old man on the seashore, who helped him realize that he would never satisfy the aspirations of his heart to find the divine by using reason alone. The old man told him that the ancient prophets helped people find the way to God, and he encouraged him to pray that the gates of light would be opened to him. Justin prayed, and in the end, he discovered the Christian faith.

Using reason, he asked questions and tested them against the truth of Christ. He had a community of faith and people with authority to guide him. He tried to verify whether the teachings of Christ corresponded with his own experience and reality, and finally, he freely chose Christ as the pattern of his life. I think this method is what Catholic Schools like Nativity attempt: to use reason and faith harmoniously.

Justin himself founded a school in Rome where he taught the “true philosophy” and taught his students how to live virtuously. Justin believed in the power of reason – of seeking and finding the truth. He would seek the truth in the Old Testament, in Greek philosophy, and in creation, but in faith would see them leading to Christ, who really satisfied the deepest desires of his heart. In the end, when asked to renounce his faith in Christ, to abandon the truth, and to worship the Roman gods, he refused, and so he suffered and gave glory to God. He gave His life for Christ, His true love. Yes, he loved intensely, so that in life and death, *in all things God could be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* May we learn to follow his example.