

Allocution de l'Archevêque au/Archbishop's Remarks at the
6th Archbishop's Benefit Dinner/ 6ième Souper-Bénéfice de l'Archevêque
Archidiocèse d'Ottawa/Archdiocese of Ottawa
Ottawa Conference and Events Centre (Hampton Inn)
16 octobre/October 16, 2013

« WHAT KIND OF MODELS FOR STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS? »

Your Excellencies,
Reverend Fathers,
dear Religious Sisters,
dear Members and Friends of the Archdiocese of Ottawa
and supporters of publicly-funded Catholic education:

We gather on the 35th anniversary of the election of Pope John Paul II. It was one of the most important papal elections in the history of the Church. By the time we celebrate the 36th anniversary, he will be declared Saint John Paul. We give thanks to God for that!

We had a papal election this year, and there has been much excitement about the new Holy Father. Pope Francis has attracted much attention, much of it favourable, even from those who are sometimes hostile to the Church. For this, we ought to be grateful, for the power of the Gospel cannot transform someone unless he first hears it.

We need to listen to Pope Francis carefully, though. I have noticed that many people who cheer the Holy Father think that he is admonishing others. We see, then, the Holy Father enlisted as a putative supporter by one faction in the Church against another.

On his pilgrimage to Assisi, the Holy Father made it clear that the Church is not one faction or another, the hierarchy or the lay faithful, but all the baptized. So when he addresses tough words to us, he is not only speaking to the bishops and priests. He is speaking to the whole Church, including the Church in the field of education.

Permit me to quote from the very first homily of Pope Francis, given in the Sistine Chapel on the day after his election:

We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord. When we are not walking, we stop moving. When we are not building on the stones, what happens? The same thing that happens to children on the beach when they build sandcastles: everything is swept away, there is no solidity. When we do not profess Jesus Christ, the saying of Léon Bloy comes to mind: “Anyone who does not pray to the Lord prays to the devil.” When we do not profess Jesus Christ, we profess the worldliness of the devil, a demonic worldliness.

That is a strong challenge to all of us! Especially to those entrusted with the Catholic mission in education, health care, social justice, development, and the various corporal works of mercy. No matter how well we do that work with professional competence, if we do not profess Jesus Christ, we run the risk of a “demonic worldliness,” to use the blunt language of Pope Francis.

In education, it is enticing to adopt the standards of the world. Despite our generous fundraising efforts tonight for parents and children in need, who can be supported discreetly by school principals, the money for Catholic education comes almost entirely from the state. The state sets most of the rules.

Thus, there is a daily temptation to conform not to the Gospel, but to the central bureaucracy. It would certainly create a stir if I accused the Ministry of Education of being a source of “demonic worldliness.” The message of Pope Francis is not to point a finger at others. Rather, we must examine our own conscience. The challenge is not so much what

the world forces us to do, but what we allow ourselves to be seduced into.

Catholic education always faces the temptation of becoming another NGO...or worse a *governmental organization*...rather than part of the evangelizing mission of the Church.

We are grateful for the support of Catholic education by the Province. However, not only does the constitution guarantee it, but is a matter of basic justice. If the state wishes to operate in education, it must respect the choices of parents, who are the primary educators of their children, and the Church. We have been about the work of education long before the British North America Act of 1867.

Catholic education has to be fully Catholic. Otherwise, we head down the path to the demonic worldliness Pope Francis warned against in the Sistine Chapel. He forcefully inveighed against it again about a week ago in Assisi. We have to be Catholic and not worldly in those models we hold up to our students for admiration and imitation. The first models—"witnesses" is the better Catholic word—for our students in our schools should be our teachers and staff. This is why school boards inquire whether teachers are living in accord with the Catholic faith before they hire them.

In a labour market where there are many excellent, unemployed teachers who live lives of Christian virtue, they should be at the top of your hiring lists. The word for this latter excellence is holiness. If we desire that our students be holy, they need to see holiness in those who guide them daily.

We also provide other models to our students. We need to propose to them—as creatively as the curriculum suggests—the heroes of the faith, those saints who will inspire young people to aspire to that excellence that is holiness. We could do no better than Marguerite d'Youville, whose feast we celebrate today. Another hero is John Paul II,

who decisively shaped history, because he was able to inspire people the world over. Our next generation would do well to emulate such champions of servant leadership.

Likewise, we must find good models when we invite guests to our schools. We are preparing students to be disciples of the Lord Jesus in a culture that is indifferent to him, even hostile to him. They need to meet models of men and women, courageous disciples and faithful Catholics, who are, in cooperation with God's grace, living the faith to the full.

These guests and partners must give an authentic Catholic witness that will inspire and encourage, not a counter-witness that will discourage and confuse. No matter how great their achievements in politics, business, sports, science, or the arts, we should not invite to our schools as guest speakers, or give awards to, those who provide a counter-witness to the Gospel.

This is a matter of heated debate. But we can get to the heart of this matter by returning to our shared goal of choosing guest speakers according to their ability to edify our students by their self-giving, their love, and their embrace of the culture of life for the sake of the Gospel, rather than according to their worldly fame.

We do well to hear the lucid observation of Pope Francis. Either we operate according to the criterion of the Gospel, or we operate according to demonic worldliness.

Cardinal Collins in Toronto likes to say, "Don't show me your mission statement. Show me your budget, and I will know what your mission is." We can paraphrase that for Catholic education. "Show me the models you propose to your students, in your teachers and in the guests you invite them to listen to, and I will know your mission."

I thank our Catholic educators here this evening. I salute and support your excellent service to our young people and their future as citizens of Canada and of the Kingdom of Heaven.

May the proceeds of our dinner tonight aid you in responding with the greatest of discretion and respect for the children and families in need. It is our Holy Father's fervent wish that our Church be of the poor and for the poor.