

«TRUE COOPERATORS WITH JESUS CHRIST»

HOMILY
AT THE USA – TORONTO
REGIONAL CONVOCATION II

(August 13, 1990)

Almost a year ago now as Hurricane Hugo was heading up the east coast of the United States, at the novitiate in Central New York tremendous winds preceded the storm; and I remember sitting in our glass-walled chapel on that particular Friday morning looking out at the white caps on the lake and at the leaves being torn from the surrounding trees. One of the novices was unsuccessfully attempting to secure our boat which was being pulled away from the shore, and so two of us went down and out into the water to help. All three of us working together were barely able to bring the boat to shore.

As I reflected later that morning on the experience, it suggested to me the image of so many parents today caught in the stormy conditions of our present social and cultural reality – parents finding their children being pulled away – and increasingly unable to bring their sons and daughters back to shore – parents overwhelmed and children in danger of being lost – parents in need of someone willing to accompany them into the turbulence – someone willing to assist them in the Christian guidance and formation of their children.

What also struck me on that particular Friday morning in Skaneateles was that the boat wasn't doing anything wrong; the boat was only doing what a boat does in a storm; and I believe the same can be said about the young people with whom we work today. Their behavior is most often an understandable response to the tremendous social and cultural upheaval of these final days of the twentieth century.

Far too many of these young people find themselves tossed about in a society replete with a tremendous cultural diversity and an unfortunate moral ambiguity and confusion. Too many are consumed by their own materialism and pursuit of instant gratification. For many, a tremendous peer group stress, rampant substance abuse, chronic low self-esteem, and poverty of love and affection are a daily reality. Many find themselves without sufficient or appropriate role models. Unfortunately, the time and energy of so many parents, an increasing number of whom are single, is dominated by the task of meeting the material support of their families; and so once again, as in the time of our Founder, we see parents in urgent need of our support and assistance.

Within this context, I suggest we hear again today the exhortation of John Baptist de La Salle to understand ourselves as one with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the gospel, who goes in search of the lost sheep to bring it back to the fold (MTR 4.1). In the real "poverty" and "abandonment" of North American youth today, we glimpse the awesome responsibility of our mission as true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children (MTR 4.2).

For God so loved our world that, when we were in danger of being lost, God sent the beloved son Jesus Christ to bring us home (John 3:16 and Romans 5:1-11). De La Salle believed that God so loves these children that the Holy Spirit raised up our family in the Church and sent us out among them to help bring them home (MTR 1.3). I

believe that, in the deepest center of so many individual Brothers today and in the heart of our aging and much humbled Institute, this same Holy Spirit continues to cry out and pray: Father, bring me home (Galatians 4:6) – a Spirit which cries out in the abandonment and needs of young people and their parents today – cries out among the too often fatherless urban poor, whose champions we once were – cries out from among an upwardly mobile middle class youth, so often lacking affection and spiritually abandoned by parents who know of God but too often don't know God – A Holy Spirit who cries out and prays to us from the depth of their distress: Bring me home (MSF 37).

I suggest to you tonight that with the prophet Jeremiah this Institute has in recent history – as our numbers have dropped by more than half and the entrance of new candidates has slowed to a trickle – been invited with Jerémiah to the potter's shed. «And so I (Jeremiah) went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at the wheel. And whenever the vessel he was making came out wrong, as happens with the clay handled by potters, he would start afresh and work it into another vessel, as potters do» (Jeremiah 18:1-8).

Brothers, can we any longer afford to doubt that it really is God who is acting decisively in the circumstances in which we find ourselves to recall and reclaim us to a more honest and authentic living of our own unique identity in the Church? In a world where teaching religion is like teaching a foreign language, the catechetical evangelization and re-formation of poor and abandoned youth in the lived love of God is our principal ministry. And yet, how many of us here tonight really believe the words of the Declaration that this world in which we live has more need than ever, even at the center of humanity's temporal

pursuits, for a witness given by people who know and love God as a living being (11.4)? How many of us here tonight are really willing to pay the price, re-establish the priority, and allow Jesus Christ to be so wholly alive in us that everything we do gives unambiguous and irrefutable witness on behalf of the gospel... that who we are becomes a clear invitation to the people with whom we work to leave behind the glamour of worldliness and enter more fully into the glory of God's children? How many of us are willing to stand here together tonight and pray: Your kingdom come... your will be done here on earth... in my life and for these children?

In a few minutes, we stand again to renew the promises of our baptism. We stand around this table of eucharistic remembrance and pray with Jesus: Father, I remain committed – not my will but yours (Matthew 26:39). We stand with John Baptist de La Salle to re-consecrate ourselves to procure God's glory – the salvation of children – as far as we're able, without counting the cost, and in the manner required of us because we have the confidence that what we do is truly God's holy work.

And so in this moment of re-commitment, I invite you to be supported and strengthened by the very real cloud of witnesses that surrounds us on every side (Hebrews 12:1) – by our beloved Founder, by our saintly brothers (especially Benilde), surrounded by the young people for whom and with whom we toil, by the parents of our students and our Lasallian colleagues, and by the humble and very human brothers and sisters who surround us tonight and with whom we have the courage to stand tonight and continue to work and struggle, impelled by that mighty energy of Christ's which is so powerful a force within us (Colossians 1:29).

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