

Homily for the May 6th, 2012 Mass  
5th Sunday of Easter, year B  
100th anniversary of the Collège St-Alexandre

In the Gospel that we just heard, Jesus uses a striking image to explain his relationship with his disciples: the image of the vine. This metaphor talks about the relationship that each disciple must have with Jesus: a branch that detaches itself from the vine will surely die. If we want to bear fruit, we must stay linked with Jesus, remain within him: that's what makes us true disciples.

But in the context of the 100th anniversary of the Collège St-Alexandre that we are celebrating today, I would like to propose to you a particular reading. I invite you to focus less on what Jesus is saying – the content of his teaching – and more on what Jesus is trying to do – the act of teaching itself. Saint John sets this scene on the evening before Jesus was betrayed and crucified. Evidently, Jesus knew what was awaiting him. But instead of using his final hours to lament, or to talk about sweet memories, he decided to teach to his apostles. We could say that today's Gospel reading is inviting us to contemplate Jesus: the good master, or the good teacher. And besides, wasn't that the title that Mary-Magdalene gave him on Easter morning? When she recognized the risen Christ, she called him « Rabbouni », which actually means « Master ».

What makes Jesus a model teacher? It seems that the main characteristic of his pedagogy is to be completely devoted to his disciples. To him, teaching is not work, but a service that he's rendering to people he loves. To him, teaching is an act of love. Why? Because by teaching, Jesus helps his disciples discover the truth: the truth about themselves, the truth about the world they inhabit, the truth about the ultimate meaning of life.

Myself, when I remember all the teachers who had an influence in my life, I don't think about the courses they taught me. Instead, I remember their commitment towards me, their words of encouragement and wisdom, and their presence and support during critical moments of my life. The education project is not only a content to transmit, but also a way of living in the world and in relationships, and of giving meaning to life.

These last few weeks have seen numerous debates and protests concerning education in our province. We found ourselves at a certain point

discussing subjects such as access to university education, a possible hike in tuition fees, models for managing universities: all those are of the utmost importance. However, these numerous discussions only skirt the core of the problem: how do we pin down the ultimate goal of education, how do we define its real meaning?

If, over the centuries, the Catholic Church has devoted itself to teaching; if it has opened new paths in the education projects on the five continents of this world; if it has devoted unimaginable human and financial resources in this aspect of social life, it's that it has always seen in it an essential condition for the blossoming of the human being.

In this spirit, the bishops who assembled at the Vatican II Council nearly 50 years ago defined thus the duties of the school: develop with special care the intellectual, creative and esthetic faculties of the human person, so that he can correctly exercise judgement, will, and affectivity; foster a sense of values; promote appropriate attitudes and behaviours; hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations; prepare for professional life; and finally, between pupils of different talents and backgrounds, promote friendly relations and foster a spirit of mutual understanding. (Gravissimum educationis # 5)

It is also in this spirit that in 1904, the Father Superior of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit, Bishop Alexandre Leroy, sent Father Amet Limbour to Canada from France. Father Limbour had, as mission, to find a proper place to establish a school of agriculture that would receive, train, and then guide young Frenchmen who wanted to settle in Canada. From that project would rise the Collège Saint-Alexandre, whose identified values today say a lot about its loyalty to the initial inspiration, and I quote: « respect of oneself and others; accountability and autonomy; willingness to learn; effort and perseverance; co-operation and collaboration; health and physical activity; openness on the surroundings and the world; promotion of the French language; and respect for the Christian heritage ». Yes, I see in these values a living echo of the Gospel. Jesus, the good master, would feel at ease in this educational environment, and would see in it a sign of the Kingdom of justice, peace and joy that he came to inaugurate among us.

But a college is also a community: community of learning, and community of life. In the first reading today, we heard how Saint Paul had trouble integrating the Christian community. We also heard how Barnabas

came to his aid by introducing him to others, by encouraging them to accept him as one of theirs, and by helping Paul forge new relationships. Each student can find himself either in the same position as Saint Paul or Barnabas. Because each new student must learn how to integrate himself, develop a sense of belonging... and each veteran student must help this integration by welcoming and supporting them, and creating an openness in a group already made. Thus is built, from generation to generation, a real community spirit that has, as its components, energy, hope and life.

Saint John, in the second reading proclaimed today, invites us to love, not only in words, but also in actions and in truth. And maybe that is the ultimate task of this school: be the place where, together, we learn how to love each other, not only in words, but also in actions and in the truth. One of the Psalms says it best: « When love meets truth, justice and peace embrace each other ». Isn't the vocation of every school to promote the search for truth? Isn't it also to encourage us to learn about true love, a love that opens us up towards the others? And isn't it that which we are celebrating today: this centennial project promoting the meeting of love and truth, in order that, in our world, justice and peace can flourish? That is the project of this school. That is the project of the Gospel. Let us entrust this project to Jesus, the Good Master. I am certain that he will continue to support us over the next 100 years.