

**Homily for the New Academic Year
September 26, 2016**

**Quincy Notre Dame High School
Quincy, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers,
Reverend Deacons,
Consecrated women,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Diamonds are formed when a great heat and a great pressure is applied to a piece of carbon deep within the surface of the earth. Over time, the heat and pressure transform the carbon mineral into a brilliant diamond that sparkles as light shines upon it. For centuries now, men have tunneled deep into the earth, laboring greatly in the darkness of the mines, to emerge with these precious gems. They have used them to adorn the crowns of kings, the reliquaries of the saints, the chalices used in the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and even the jewelry given to the women they love.

In today's first reading, we heard the Lord say through the Prophet Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart and place a new Spirit within you, taking from your bodies stony hearts and giving you natural hearts"

(Ezekiel 36:26). Whenever we hold grudges in our hearts or think badly of others, whenever our hearts are not full of love, it is as though they were pieces of carbon waiting for the heat and strength of the Lord's love to transform them like diamonds. Sometimes we resist the Lord's desire to cleanse us from all of our impurities; it is in these times that we should call upon the grace of the Holy Spirit "who searches hearts" and can help us yield to the power of God's love and become like diamonds shining with the light of love (cf. Ezekiel 36:25; Romans 8:27).

Jesus sent seventy-two of his disciples "to every town and place he intended to visit" to announce the kingdom of God (Luke 10:1). These disciples were to prepare the hearts of the people to repent of their sins and receive the salvation offered us in Christ. The disciples were to help the people allow the Lord to change their hearts hardened by sin into hearts softened by love; they were to make the hearts of the proud and foolish into the hearts of the childlike.

When these disciples returned today, "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21). He rejoiced because the Father hid the mysteries of redemption "from the wise and the learned" but "revealed them to the childlike" (Luke 10:21). Jesus speaks in this way because "for the child it is

natural to receive good gifts, and so docility, obedience, trust and sweet surrender are not for him virtues to be expressly achieved but the most . . . natural things in the world.”¹ The Father has revealed the mystery of our redemption to the childlike because they receive good gifts naturally, without questioning the motive of the giver. Those who are childlike trust in the one who loves them; they receive this love and love in return. The wise and the learned, on the other hand, do not trust in the unconditional love of others and so would question the message of salvation in Christ, looking for a condition attached to it.

If this is true, if the wise and the learned do not trust in God’s love, why have we gathered today to ask God’s blessings on this new academic year? When Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit after His disciples returned, He rejoiced because the Father is “not only creator through power, but also governor through providence.”² We have Catholic schools so we can understand his governance of creation, so we can understand how the world works and why.

More importantly, we also have Catholic schools so we can understand something of the power of God’s love that leads to His act of creation. It is only by understanding the creative purpose of His love that

we can understand our place within creation. For this reason, none of our studies – whether math or science or art or social studies or language or physical education – can ever really be disconnected from the study of our Catholic faith. As you learn more about the way God governs the universe through your studies, you will be able to trust in Him fully and receive His love just as small children receive the love of their parents.

No matter what we study, we should never forget that “to be a child means to owe one’s existence to another, and even in our adult life we never quite reach the point where we no longer have to give thanks for being the person we are.” This is why “we never quite outgrow our condition of children, nor do we therefore ever outgrow the obligation to give thanks for ourselves or to continue to ask for our being.”³ We have come together for the celebration of the Eucharist this morning to thank God for all that we have, for the desire and ability to learn, and to ask the assistance of the Holy Spirit as we seek to learn about the world and about our faith.

I hope and pray that as you study your different subjects this year that you will continually discover in them something new about the mind and love of God. I also pray that as you understand his love more deeply,

you will cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit and allow him to transform even the coldest and hardest of hearts with warm and loving hearts. In this way, you students in this Gem City will receive hearts like gems. Like diamonds in the mine, your hearts, formed by the strength and heat of Jesus' love, will radiate and refract the love of God before the world, and the Father will reveal the mystery of redemption through you.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 22.

² Saint Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 10.36. Robert J. Karris, trans. (Saint Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 963.

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 49.