

Archbishop Aymond, Archbishop Hughes, Christian Brothers, Friends of the Brothers, and alumni and students of various Christian Brother schools:

I had the blessing of being educated by the Christian Brothers at De La Salle High School in New Orleans. Wonderful brothers taught me math, English, Latin, and religion. I would sit in those classroom and the brothers would speak. Here today I look out at the Christian Brothers sitting in the front pews and this time they are sitting and I am speaking. I have waited 51 years for this moment! Allow me to savor the moment.

The Gospel passage just proclaimed was the Visitation of Our Lady to Elizabeth. We heard of the joy of Mary to bring the Lord to Elizabeth and the joy of Elizabeth to welcome the Lord.

We celebrate here the joy of 100 years of the Christian Brothers in California and Louisiana bringing the Lord to others. The joy of helping young people to discover that the Lord is real and is real in their lives. The joy of helping young people to discover and to develop their God-given talents.

Although we celebrate here the sesquicentennial of the Christian Brothers in California and the centennial in Louisiana, the story is longer than that. On a personal note, as noted in the program, the Christian Brothers were previously present in Louisiana in the latter half for the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the schools where the Brothers taught was St. John the Baptist Parish in New Orleans where my grandfather was enrolled as a student and was also Christian Brother educated. So even though we celebrate a century of continuous service in Louisiana, I am both grateful to the Christian Brothers for the education which my grandfather received more than 135 years ago and which I later received at De La Salle High School here in New Orleans.

But the story goes back even further, to 1679 and the interest which a young priest named John Baptist de la Salle showed in

providing education to boys from poverty situations which in the words of St John were “far from salvation.” He felt an education could help the boys make a living and that spiritual formation could help them spiritually.

Next April will be the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. John’s death which is also part of our celebration here today. The story of the Christian Brothers during the more than three centuries of educational ministry is a rich one. There have been times of growth and times of difficulties. There have been times of prosperity, as the world judges such things, and times of challenges, again from the perspective of the world. But this celebration allows us to look back and to see that the hand of God was with the Brothers in all things.

Institutions may come and go, the number of members in an order may fluctuate between times of growth and decline, but the faith which St John wished to share with young men remains. That is the legacy of St. John. That is the charism of the Christian Brothers: to teach young people for the purpose of their betterment in life and for the salvation of their souls. In short, to give both knowledge and wisdom to young people

Those two words, knowledge and wisdom, are not synonyms. Knowledge comes from education. Wisdom comes from formation. Knowledge helps the young person to learn how to make a living. Wisdom helps the young person to learn how to make a life which begins now and lasts into all of eternity.

The Brothers of Christian Schools began as an effort to help those in material poverty and that ministry continues. I note that while the number of Christian Brothers has decreased markedly since 1965, the number of students enrolled in the schools of the Order has increased markedly. The charism established by St. John continues. To be true to that charism, Christian Brothers strive to make it possible for those of limited financial means to attend. The material poverty which motivated

St. John continues today. But there is another type of poverty in our society, it is the poverty of the spirit.

As St. Theresa of Calcutta said: “There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”

That poverty was also present in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it caused St John to say that the poor boys he reached out to were “far from salvation.” To teach “the poor” is to attend to the hungers of the body, the mind, and the soul. That was the motivation of St. John to begin the Brothers of the Christian Schools; that has been the ministry of the Christian Brothers for 300 years; that has been the ministry of the Brothers in California and Louisiana.

We gather here this morning and I am confident that I echo the sentiments of many in thanking you, the Christian Brothers, for your service to the Church and, particularly, to many young people. Your ministry has powerfully impacted and changed many lives.

May God bless you and may continue to use your ministry in California, Louisiana, and throughout the world as His instrument of faith, hope, and love.

Live Jesus in our hearts....forever!