

Remarks by Brother Roch Dufresne, FSC
to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Annual Religious Brothers Mass and Dinner

February 24, 2019

Good Evening!

This gathering of Brothers in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is a unique event for us. Not only is it a gathering of the vowed male religious who are involved in a variety of apostolates across the diocese, it is also one of the ways that we celebrate our common love of Jesus Christ and his wide and dynamic church. For in the sight of God, each one of us here does what we uniquely do because of the dynamism of God's life, the Holy Spirit, in our own lives – whether as a Brother or other religious, a priest, a bishop, or a single or married person. And so a celebration and acknowledgement like this is something to be appreciated by everyone.

First, I would like to thank the Brothers of Cathedral High School who everyday inspire me to do the best I can by their fraternal presence and constant support. It is because of that spirit and the incredible help of our lay partners that Cathedral continues after nearly 100 years to fulfill De LaSalle's vision.

I want to thank also the Brothers Council. They are the ones behind the scenes who make sure that events like this are well-organized and successful. They help us to be united and come to know one another. And since they are all Brothers themselves, we can be sure that the job will be well done.

It is good for us to remember how important the Brothers' vocation is within the context of today's world, both the larger world and the world of the Church. When so many religious orders are diminishing, and the vocation seems to be less chosen – perhaps less valued – in the larger population, it is all the more important that we live that vocation in an exemplary way, in a way that does credit both to the Church within which it serves, within the religious order through which its ministry is expressed, and within the specific community that it serves. Most of us will not

ever know the impact that we have on those that we work with day after day. But it's there. It's there as strongly as the impact of other religious throughout history. Perhaps they were never declared saints, but they lived like saints, acted like saints, thought like saints, prayed like saints, and worked like saints. We are all called to be like them: to be saints to those who are entrusted to our care. That is our privilege; that is our responsibility; that is our calling. And since we are Brothers, we must be sure that the job will be well done.

As a De La Salle Brother, and as someone who works with technology on a daily basis, I know that modern technology and social media have both positive and negative aspects to them. One of the things we have to constantly think about, and one of the things that we should certainly exemplify in our work, is the reflective, purposeful use of that technology. When others look at us, they should say "So that's how you can use technology well!" Bishop Barron and his "Word on Fire" videos, podcasts, and social media channels are one example of doing this well. I hope that my work at KCHS is another example. Each of us should reflect on how we can be similarly thoughtful and purposeful. But we should do so within our individual communities, and hold one another accountable as we journey in this way of the saints, as we follow Jesus Christ.

The De La Salle Brothers have been involved in Catholic education on the West Coast for 150 years, coming first to Saint Mary's College, where we were invited by Bishop Alemany, and took over a struggling diocesan institution. That one move led to other schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, and soon throughout California, including coming to Los Angeles in 1927 to start Cathedral High School.

When I think about the things that continue to inspire me as a Brother in this ministry of education, I think about some of the things that our Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, said. For example, "Do you have a faith that is such that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform and the one that God asks of you, for this is the purpose of your work." What a good perspective and sentiment that is for all of us involved in Catholic education and the mini-miracles that we run into each year. And when it comes to working with those from poor and

disadvantaged circumstances, I recall one sentence from one of his meditations, in which he says, “Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them.” He tells us that if we want to find Jesus, find him in those who are most in need, find him beneath what St. Teresa of Calcutta called his most distressing disguise. If we could only, more and more, do just that in each of our individual ministries, I think that we would become better as Brothers, as ministers, and simply as Catholic Christians.

Let me leave you with just three pieces of advice that John Baptist de La Salle, the Church’s Patron Saint of All Teachers of Youth, gave to his followers. One of the pieces of advice is good for anyone to follow. Here it is: “Never speak to anyone except with kindness, and if you fear to speak otherwise, keep silent.” Simple, direct, and very true. Today, I would say, this advice especially includes social media.

And in terms of the challenges that all of us face, he wrote to one of the Brothers: “Take care not to let yourself be discouraged by anxieties and ailments; life is full of them.” Then he follows this up later with this: “Be satisfied with what you can do, since this satisfies God, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that, provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God’s grace than you imagine.” Some of us may still be waiting for something to kick in before venturing forth, starting that new project, or reaching out beyond our comfort zone. De La Salle encourages us to trust the way of God’s grace, to take that next step, and to start a dance with Providence that depends on us for the first move.

Finally, he constantly advised his Brothers to put themselves into God’s hands, to trust in God’s providential care. “How long,” he tells them, “has Jesus been presenting himself to you and knocking at the door of your heart, in order to make his dwelling within you and you have not wanted to receive him.” We are Brothers together not only because of our ministries and our vows. Finally, we are Brothers together because we are Brothers of Jesus Christ. That’s the brotherhood that makes the real difference in the world. That’s the brotherhood that sticks. And that’s the brotherhood that God expects of us.

So how do we adapt to our modern challenges and circumstances? We adapt to them in the same way that our different Founders adapted to them. We look lovingly at the needs before us, and we respond lovingly in the light of the Gospel and of our individual charisms. We not only think out of the box; we start building a new box. And we can do so because Jesus Christ is our light, our guide, and our inspiration, while we bring our unique personalities, our unique efforts, our unique relationships to the work of the Gospel today.

Please continue to work for, and pray for, an increase in vocations to each of our religious orders. But also know that God is answering prayers through each of us right now. We just have to be the kind of Brothers – perhaps never acknowledged as saints – who can be trusted to get the job done. May God bless all of our endeavors, both today and into the future.

Thank you for the honor bestowed on me tonight. Enjoy the rest of the evening.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Pray for us
Live Jesus in our hearts, Forever