



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS (DE LA SALLE
BROTHERS)**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 16 May 2019*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

I offer my welcome to you who represent the entire spiritual family founded by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of his death. I greet and thank Br Robert Schieler, Superior General; I address my warm greeting to each one of you and I would like it to be conveyed to all the Brothers of Christian Schools who work in the Church with generosity, skill and faithful adherence to the Gospel. This important anniversary of your Founder is an auspicious occasion for your Institute to highlight the figure of a pioneer in the field of education, who created an innovative educational system in his time. His example and his witness confirm the original timeliness of his message for today's Christian community, illuminating the path to be followed. He was a brilliant and creative innovator in the *vision of schools*, the *concept of teachers*, and in *teaching methods*.

His *vision of schools* led him to become ever more clearly persuaded that education is the right of everyone, including the poor. For this reason he did not hesitate to renounce the Canonry and his wealthy family inheritance, in order to dedicate himself entirely to the lowest social class. He gave life to a community of exclusively lay people in order to advance his ideal, convinced that the Church cannot remain extraneous to the social contradictions of the times which she is called to confront. It was this conviction that led him to institute an original experience of consecrated life: the presence of religious educators who, without being priests, would interpret in a new way the role of "lay monks", by immersing themselves completely in the reality of their time and thus contributing to the progress of civil society.

Daily contact with the educational world ripened his awareness of identifying a new *concept of teachers*. Indeed, he was convinced that education is a serious reality, for which people need to be adequately prepared; but he had before his eyes all the structural and functional flaws of a precarious institution that required order and form. He then sensed that teaching cannot be merely a trade, but is a mission. Therefore he surrounded himself with people suited to popular education, inspired by Christianity, with attitudinal and natural talents for education. He devoted all his energy to their formation. He himself became an example for they who had to provide both ecclesial and social service, and work promptly in order to promote what he defined as the “dignity of the teacher”.

With the intention of providing concrete responses to the requests of his time in the educational field, John Baptist de La Salle undertook bold forms of *teaching methods*. In this respect he was moved by an extraordinary pedagogical realism. He substituted the French language for Latin, which had normally been used in teaching; he separated the students into homogenous learning groups in view of more effective work; he established Seminaries for countryside teachers, that is for young people who wanted to become teachers without becoming part of any religious institution; he founded Sunday Schools for adults and two hostels, one for juvenile delinquents and another for the rehabilitation of the incarcerated. He dreamt of a school open to everyone; for this reason he did not hesitate to address even extreme educational necessities, by introducing a method of rehabilitation through school and work. In these formative realities he initiated a corrective pedagogy which, in contrast to the custom of the times, brought study and work to young people under sentence — with arts and crafts rather than just a cell or lashes.

Dear spiritual children of John Baptist de La Salle, I exhort you to study and imitate his passion for the least and the discarded. In the furrow of his apostolic testimony, may you be protagonists of a “culture of resurrection”, especially in those existential contexts where the culture of death is prevalent. Never tire of going in search of those who find themselves in modern-day “sepulchres” of dismay, degradation, distress and poverty, in order to offer hope of new life. May a passion for the educational mission — which made your Founder a teacher and witness for many of his contemporaries — and his teaching still nourish your projects and your actions today.

His ever timely figure is a gift for the Church and a precious stimulus for your Congregation, called to a renewed and enthusiastic adherence to Christ. Looking to the Divine Teacher, you can work with greater generosity in service to the new evangelization to which the entire Church is committed today. The forms of the Gospel message demand to be adapted to the concrete situations of different contexts, but this also entails an effort of fidelity to the origins, so that the apostolic style that is proper to your religious Family may continue to respond to people’s expectations. I know that this is the task that animates you and I exhort you to walk with courage in this direction.

May you fulfil with renewed vigour your mission among the young generations, with that bold

reforming spirit that characterized John Baptist de La Salle: he proclaimed the Gospel of hope and charity to everyone. May the Blessed Virgin always sustain you and obtain for you abundant apostolic fruits.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for all you do in the field of education. I accompany you with my prayers and my blessing. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!