

## Education for Life

*Thanksgiving Mass*

### **Introduction**

There are many reasons for giving thanks: the gift of life, our education and upbringing, the experience of Education for Life, God's ongoing presence in us, his love and kindness and his boundless mercy and goodness.

All around us there is evidence of what God is for us and has done for us:

- Making us his people
- Saving us from sin and evil
- Always lifting us up and carrying us.

### **What we have to do in return**

In return we have to know, understand and accept God's love for us:

- by accepting and keeping his commandments
- by being friends with Jesus – believing and doing all he has revealed to us
- by being prepared to lay down our lives for our friends
- by loving one another a truly and fully as possible
- by carrying out his commission to bear fruit that will last.

Let these be our reasons for giving thanks to God our loving Father by this Mass.

## Homily

### **Introduction**

Whenever I am asked to speak on a pastoral question, the first thing I do is to check my personal experience for possible angles of approach. Then I turn to the Scriptures which are a tremendous source of inspiration and guidance.

There are few if any human situation that are not dealt with in the Scriptures.

Given that human history is full of instances of problematic relations between persons and nations, it is no surprise that there are numerous passages in both old and new Testaments about changing our way of life.

### **The Maker's Instructions**

The striking feature of Jesus' life of preaching and teaching is the number of times that he called on people to change their behaviour - "Repent and Believe the Good News", or to turn away from evil - "Go, and do not sin again".

But for us today the message that I believe is most appropriate is contained in his conversation with the rich young man who offered to follow him through thick and thin:

*What good must I do to have eternal life?*

*Why do you ask me about what is good?*

*There is only one who is good. If you would enter life keep the commandments" (Mt 19:20)*

*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will*

*have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*

### **What does this mean in practice?**

What Jesus is talking about is real change of behaviour, of lifestyle, of who and how you are – *Regime Change* – if you like.

For you who are here today, it means change from what you were before *Education for Life*, before your experience of Jesus working in you to bring you to a deeper and clearer understanding of who and what you are!

To become what EFL set out to make you, you had to change and change radically, i.e. from deep within yourself, from how you saw and presented yourself to yourself, to friends, family and neighbours, but especially to God.

*Regime Change* isn't a bad analogy, because it is not only a change of name, or of appearance, but a change of the very way that things are and work. It is a change that affects and is clearly seen in how you conduct your more serious relationship with others.

This is crucially important when we are talking about and with young people who are in the difficult process of forming and nurturing relationship some of which will be

life long in the state of marriage. (I am looking forward to being invited to my first EFL wedding!)

*Regime Change* means:

- a) setting in place a guiding vision and values that will determine what you are and do;
- b) setting up new rules of behaviour, or at least reviewing and renewing existing rules to guide your relationships;
- c) making clear the concrete measures that are to be taken to make the new way of life work.

### ***Application to Youth and Young Adults***

Your *Regime Change* can be summarised in these simple but very meaningful words.

“For me, *Regime Change* or Change of Behaviour means:

If I am not married, to be true to myself, then I will not engage in any sexual activity whatsoever.

When I am married, I will engage in sex with my lifelong partner only.

That is the new basic rule of *Regime Change*.

But it must be accompanied by a new vision and values which are as follows:

My new vision is to be a fully what God had in mind when he created me in his image and likeness, or what Jesus had in mind for me when he died for me so that I could keep the commandments and follow him.

Foremost among the values to which I am committed to live are:

- good must be done; evil avoided;
- right must be practised, wrong rejected;
- truth must be believed, falsehood renounced.

One of the first consequences of these values is that human life and the human person must be given the highest respect after God.

So too must the faculties for passing on life, i.e. our sexuality – the thing that makes me as a man able to father a child, or as a woman able to give birth to new life.

### ***Where does Jesus come in?***

Not much of what I have outlined above will happen, unless we each of us who are committed to engaging in the *Regime Change* or Change of Behaviour programme, becomes totally exposed to and makes him/herself subject to the experience of a real encounter and relationship with Jesus.

Like the young man we too must keep on asking *Good Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?*

Our encounter with Jesus must be real like that of the young man, or of Nathaniel, who knew exactly what Jesus meant when he said *I saw you under the fig tree.*

For this to happen, we must open ourselves up fully to the gift of faith, faith of the kind that healed the son of the father who had said: *Yes Lord I believe, strengthen my little faith*; faith of the kind that made Peter say after his *Regime Change*: *Yes Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you*”. And Jesus continues to say to Peter and to each one of us: *You. Follow me.*

### ***Conclusion***

Whatever you do, do not respond as the young man did because he was too attached to the things that he possessed or rather that possessed him. He went away full of sorrow and regret that he could not break away from the things that held him back for becoming the person Jesus was going to help him to become.

In this case you must not “*go and do the same*”, but rather do as Mary urged the waiters at Cana in Galilee: “*Do whatever he tells you.* AMEN.

+ Wilfrid Card Napier OFM

**Archbishop of Durban**

P.S. Now that I have finished the official homily let me speak to you from the heart. EFL is the answer to many if not all the problems of youth and young adults that I heard about from EFL and Youth Life Skills teams of the Archdiocese.

### Story 1

What are those problems? Teenage Pregnancy, Suicide, No communication with Parents, Drug and Alcohol culture.

No meaning to life, no future, no guidance, no vision.

### Story 2

Nieces' pregnancies – disappointment, but also gratitude for not choosing abortion. Two little boys are someone's son, grandson, no a lump of cells.

### Story 3

Positive experience of nephew and nieces in law – met through RENEW