

Archbishop William Goh:

## HOMILY OF THE ARCHBISHOP

**M**y dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in the first reading which we have just heard, the prophet speaks about a new heaven and a new earth. Indeed, my dear brothers and sisters, the truth is that the world is changing rapidly, as a result of science and technology, and mass communication. But is the world being made anew in the real sense of the word?

We are living in bewildering times. Why do I say this? Simply because the traditional values that we hold so strongly, steadfastly, these values are being eroded away. When we started, all our Catholic schools had strong moral religious values that have seen us through all this while. And perhaps the current generation of leaders we have, whether in the corporate world, in civic life or in government, have benefited from Christian or Catholic education.

But, my dear friends, the tide is changing. Because of secularisation and the combined effects of relativism, materialism, and individualism in a negative sense, all these values that we hold are being challenged. Values of filial piety, values of marriage, values of the family, values of obedience – all these are put in question today. And that is the reason why I say: this is a very critical and also a most confusing period of human history. For more than two thousand years, life was much simpler, things were much clearer, sometimes perhaps too neat: things were either right or wrong. There were no grey areas.

But now everything is grey. Just ask the young people about all those traditional values. What is their response? "It's up to you."

You know, my dear brothers and sisters, this new heaven and this new earth that the prophet speaks about, is it real? A world where there is no more mourning, no more grieving; a world where there is peace and harmony; a world that can help you to live until a hundred. In Singapore it reaches eighty, twenty more years to go and you reach the Biblical promise, work harder.

But what is the central message of today's scripture reading? The truth is that the first reading, the responsorial psalm and the Gospel, all have the same message: new life, new heaven, new earth can only come from God. They cannot come from men. Only God can give us life. Only God can create a new heaven, a new earth. The responsorial psalm said: only God can rescue us from death.

So, don't think that humanity is so powerful that it can bring, on its own effort, a new heaven and a new earth. And this is the lie that is propagated by the world. Secularism, humanism, they say the same thing: "We can do it. We don't need God." This is what they're saying: "We can do it through science and technology."

You know, my dear brothers and sisters, science and technology, they are wonderful gifts from the Lord. But science and technology cannot change hearts. Science and technology cannot change lives. They can make your life comfortable; that is true. But they cannot give you life. No one is happy simply because he has sufficient physical, material things in life. No one is complete without love.

Today we are not too sure what love is anymore because we don't believe that love is everlasting. We promote divorce, we promote same sex unions, we promote cohabitation. What is love? Love means we are together, that's all. If I don't like you, tomorrow we say "it's over". Is this love? A love that cannot last, is it worth loving? Whoever wants to love temporarily?

No one ever said to his wife: "I will love you for about three years. After that we will divorce."

If you ever said that to your wife, she would say: "Better we don't get married, then".

**AS EDUCATORS YOU ARE TO TRANSFORM MINDS AND CHANGE LIVES. YOU ARE TO PLANT THE RIGHT VALUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. YOUR TASK IS TO GIVE LIFE. MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL OR MATERIAL LIFE, YOUR TASK IS TO GIVE THE FULLNESS OF LIFE.**

Every lover says: "We want to love forever."

But do they believe that love is forever? And that is why today there are young people who no longer believe in marriage and family. Because they see divorces, infidelity everywhere. It's something so common as if it is normal. They are also influenced by what they watch on TV, in the movies. Sleeping around is something so 'natural', 'nothing wrong with that'. Ask the young people:

"Is it alright to sleep with your boyfriend, girlfriend?"

And they may say: "Of course, so long as there is mutual consent"

Even without love it's alright – so long as there is mutual consent.

My dear brothers and sisters, when science and technology do not grow in tandem with the moral and the spiritual life of the human person, when there is this dichotomy, it is tragic. It will lead to the destruction of humanity.

As you can see in the proliferation of armoury, weapon, nuclear power, we can see how power can manipulate people. Bioscience, or for that matter, cloning, euthanasia and all sorts will lead to the destruction of humanity. Genetics is beautiful but today we are talking about the survival or the fittest, we will eliminate anyone who does not have good genes. I think eighty per cent of us would not have been here if we had gone according to modern times, because most of us have got bad genes.

Euthanasia is promoted simply because we don't believe in love any more. Who wants to care for the elderly? "We have our lives to live!" We say. "Those of you who are elderly, if you cannot contribute, cannot look after my children, it is your obligation to die. You take up space. And you're making my life difficult. I can't spend time looking after you".

Recently I spoke to an elderly lady, ninety years old, and she told me: "You know Father, every day I look at these four walls. In those days when I was strong I could still bring my dog out for a walk. But now I cannot walk. That's why I can understand why elderly people want to die." Because they are not loved. If you were loved, do you think you would want to die? No. Nobody wants euthanasia if there is love. Because they are not loved. Everybody is busy. Children are busy and when you are elderly and cannot walk any more, you just face the four walls. That is your life.

And so, my dear brothers and sisters, how then can we bring about the new heaven and the new earth? How can we care for the future of humanity? And I keep saying this and we must remember this: I'm not the bishop for three hundred thousand Catholics in Singapore. I'm bishop for the Catholics and even beyond. The same thing for you as Catholics. We don't exist for Catholics only. The Church is missionary. The Church exists for mission, for evangelisation. The Church does not exist for herself. That is why the nature of the Church is missionary. If the Church were not missionary, we would have disowned our identity. That's why the holiest of all the tasks of the Church is mission. There is no other. So, to bring about this new heaven and new earth we need to cooperate with the grace of God.

The work of educators, as far as I'm concerned, is the most important work. You are laying the foundations. And this is true even for the bishop. That is why the primary duty of the bishop is to teach, before he governs, before he ministers. The bishop's chief duty is to preach and to teach. When I find the opportunity, I will teach because teaching forms minds. You cannot minister, you cannot govern if people are not converted.

You are educators. As educators you are to transform minds and change lives. You are to plant the right values for young people. Your task is to give life. More than just physical or material life, your task is to give the fullness of life.

In today's Gospel, we have Jesus healing the young boy. He is the life giver. And today we need to reach out to the young people by asking ourselves: Are we sincere in giving them the fullness of life? Just because we give them a good academic

education, we may think we have done our job, but what's the use of a good education if values are not imparted? We are short-changing them.

When they became successful they will only work for themselves. Are they going to work for humanity? Are they going to give themselves to society or just be interested in enriching themselves? They may use their ingenuity and their talents for the wrong things, like to manipulate people. Will they be happy? Eventually they will not be happy. They can be successful, rich, and powerful. But their hearts will be empty.

And that is why, as educators, we are called to cooperate with the grace of God. We are called to form the future leaders of society.

The future of our society is in your hands. Many of us are short-sighted: our focus may only be on helping students get good grades. And we are quite happy with it. But who will transform the world? Who will transform society; the leaders of tomorrow?

What kind of leaders are we going to give to society? That, for me, is the question. Are these leaders who are going to govern Singapore imbued with integrity, with the values of the Gospel, who are virtuous, who understand the meaning of life, who are compassionate? What sort of leaders do you want to run the country?

As we celebrate our fiftieth anniversary, we must give credit to the government for giving us some universal values. Without these values, there will be among other things, corruption at every level. We need to impart Catholic values, which are universal values. We need to cultivate our young people in the values of the Gospel. That is the greatest gift we can give to anyone, to live a life of integrity, a life of service, a life of commitment to society. It is in giving that you live. That is why my motto as a bishop is: *ut vivant* (that they may live).

I am totally convinced that the only way to live is to die for humanity and to die for God. There is no other way to live. And that is the message I bring across to anyone I meet because Jesus says "I come to give you life, life abundantly."

To understand better your involvement as educators in transforming society with the values of the Gospel, I invite you to read *Gaudium et Spes*, Constitutions of the Church number thirty-nine. When you read it you will understand the involvement of the Church in society.

Now, the next question I want to pose is this: "What is the foundation of Catholic values? How do we impart values to our young people? Are the values we are imparting to our young people just secular values?"

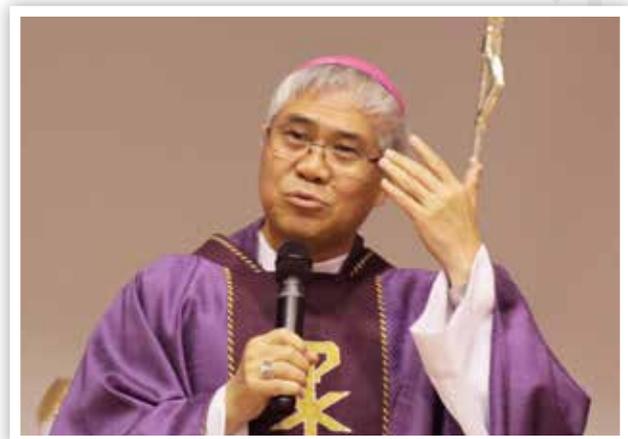
What distinguishes us from non-Christian schools? Our values, ultimately! And not simply ethical values. No. They are the values founded in Christ. Christ is the centre of all that we do because in Christ Jesus, His message and His person are identified. Depart from Christ, our fundamental values would be inadequate. They're not wrong but inadequate. And this is where the relationship between faith and reason comes in. The task of the Church in her service to the world is to purify reason with faith. Reason, to some extent, can arrive at the truth [and be loved], but very often reason is confused and blurred by selfish motives, consciously or unconsciously.

If in providing values to our young people, we don't give them Jesus, then, what are we doing? We are short-changing them because we don't give them the source of these values. It will be like giving fish to people who are poor but not teaching them how to fish. Ultimately, the mission of the Church is to lead everyone to Jesus, so that they will have the fullness of truth, of life and of love. So, a Catholic school that does not proclaim Christ explicitly would have fallen short as a Catholic school.

How then do we impart values? What is the pedagogy of imparting values and faith to our young people? Now I must first speak about the reality of the situation in Singapore. I have four or five points to make. You might agree or disagree with me. I speak from my heart. I don't like to say nice things only.

Number one: in Singapore, most of our Catholic schools have less than forty percent Catholic students. Many of our teachers, teaching in Catholic schools, are also not Catholic.

Number two: in terms of the position of the schools, unlike in the past, we do not have a strong presence of religious in our



Catholic schools. We still have some presence, but very few, and so the icon of the sacred is lost. Who sets the direction and policies of the school? Most of the schools are run by School Management Committees, made up of alumni, parents, school leaders and religious.

The third thing is the question of who is the pay master? As the maxim goes, he who pays the piper, calls the tune. The bishop is not the paymaster, so we are constrained by what our schools can do.

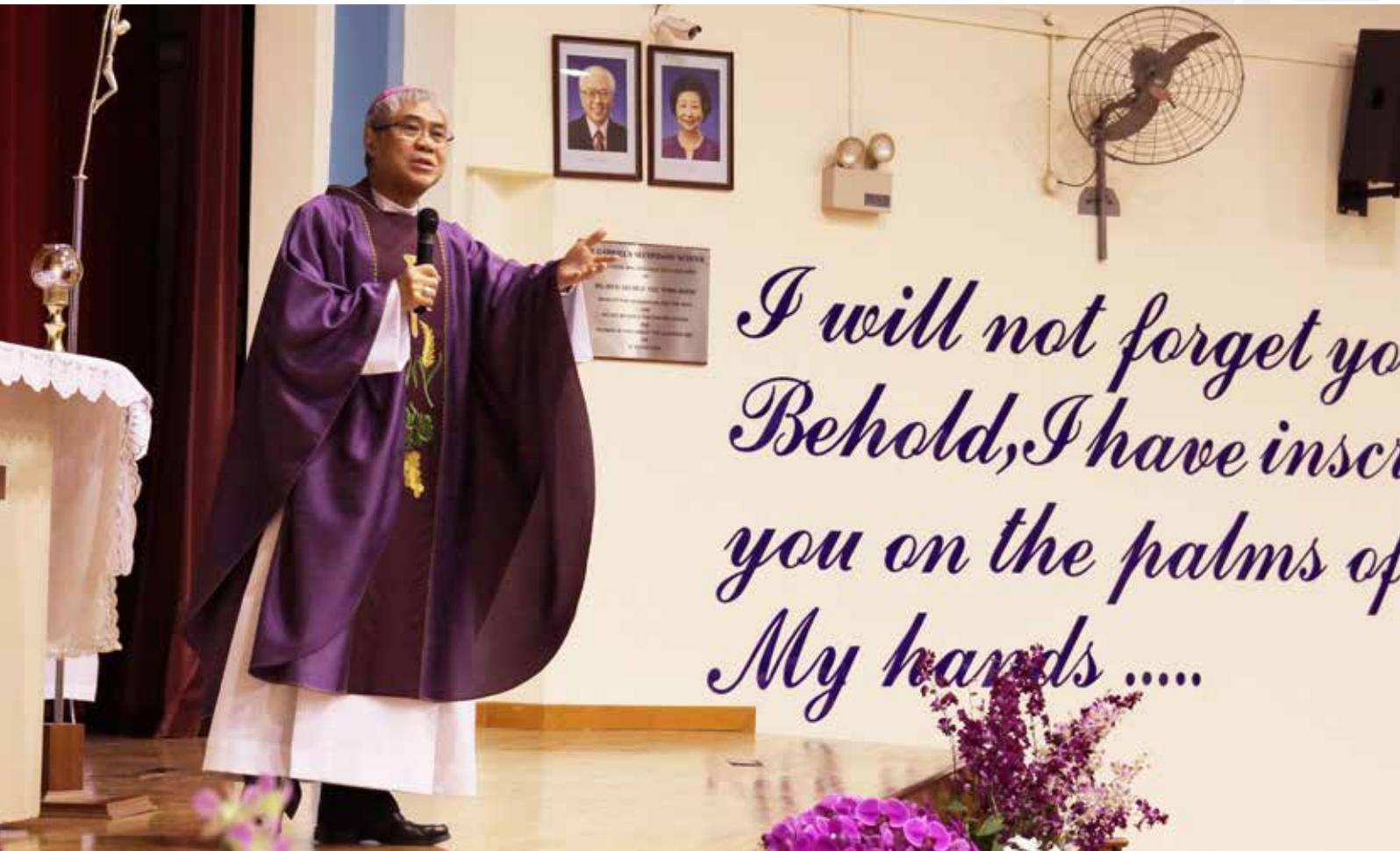
Fourth thing is that all our Catholic schools today are run by different sponsoring authorities and so they run their schools according to their own vision and direction. It doesn't mean it is not good because every Catholic school must have a character. We are not against that. But there may be a lack of concerted effort to move together as Church. How do we bring all these together? At the end of the day we must have a common mission: we want to give the best to our students. ACCS is a beautiful instrument, but at the moment it lacks the capacity to coordinate more effectively, to steer all the schools in working together in unison, hence it has become more like a resources centre, doing things like organising this seminar. So the bishop's role has been reduced to a ceremonial one, without any real influence, unlike the Methodist schools here, where the bishop owns the schools and hence he steers the direction.

In this kind of situation, what do we do? How do we respond? I like to take a page from Pope Emeritus Benedict. He spoke about the courtyard of the gentiles. This is a beautiful way of applying the new evangelisation to schools. What is this courtyard of the gentiles? The courtyard of the gentiles refers to the Jerusalem Temple, where there is the Holy of Holies – only the priests can enter – then we have the courtyard for the Jews themselves, and then we have the outer courtyard. Non-Jews who want to seek God would stay in the outer courtyard since they are not Jews. I liken our Catholic schools to the courtyard of the gentiles; a place where non-Catholic students and teachers gather. They may not be convinced that Jesus is the Christ. It's alright. But the fact that parents send their children to Catholic schools implies that they are open to the values of the school, the teachings of the school, and want their child to be educated in Catholic values. That's why we must not be afraid to be more explicit in terms of proclaiming the Gospel values, or speaking about Christ. If we are lacking courage in presenting our Catholic values and Christ Himself, then we are not being faithful to them. In fact, we are also short changing the parents, because they thought they were sending their children to a Catholic school, with Catholic values.

Now I want to bring out two new terms for you. There are two words here I want you to reflect on: Kerygma and Didache. These are Greek words. What is the Kerygma? Kerygma is the encounter with Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord. The Kerygma is the proclamation of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. That Jesus is my Lord, my Saviour. What is the Didache? Didache means on-going formation, in terms of doctrine, in terms of morality. The Church begins with Kerygma, not with Didache. That means that the beginning of a Christian life is always Kerygma. Today in the Gospel Jesus says: "You want to see signs and portents otherwise you don't believe." That is true. Unless we see Jesus as the risen Lord, how can we believe? Everybody needs a deep encounter with the risen Lord in order to have a radical transformation of life. That's why Pope Benedict in his apostolic letter "God is love" says [that] it is not because of a lofty choice or ethical choice that you become a Christian; rather, it is an encounter with an event, that event is Jesus himself that changes your whole orientation in life. Isn't it true? Some of us may feel our life has no meaning. It's like dragging of feet. Then suddenly you fall in love and you're on a cloud, so happy. Now you find meaning. You begin living for somebody or living for love. That's why I say: if you're not living for love, life has no meaning. Those people who live for their work only may seem grumpy and even make life difficult for others, because they can become very ambitious. They measure their happiness in terms of success in work or what the world thinks of them. But inside, they are very lonely people. They may not have capacity for relationship. Didache works only for those who have found the Lord and are undergoing formation.

It is alright to begin with the Didache. In most of the Catholic schools, you are trying to impart values, put a little crucifix here and there, and sometimes even the Bishop's photo and of the Holy Father to let people know that this is a Catholic school. We may have some prayer sessions, or talks about values. So, this is called Didache. Let me ask you a question. Can your life be changed just by knowing the values? We all know the right things, that's what St Paul says in Romans chapter seven: to know the law doesn't mean that you can do the law. You can have ethics as well. Ethics doesn't work. Just because you know what is right and wrong may not mean that you are convinced and will live it. We don't die for an ideology, we die for a person. If I love you, I would die for you. So, Didache is good as a preparation. But the laws alone, knowing what is right and wrong, might not change you. Yes, it would influence your life to some extent, but it doesn't mean that you would be able to do what is right. What changes us? It is love. That is why, if the Catholic schools remain on this level, it is inadequate. Of course, at the end of the day, it is through your values, and most of all, through your witnessing that people are inspired to change.

As educators we don't educate in terms of preaching, but through our way of life, really. It's the ambience that you create in



school, first by the teachers and the principals. If they're religious, better still. It's the way of life. That's why Catholic schools are not an institution producing students for grades, but a community. A community that experiences the love of Christ constantly in their lives, and then, when you proclaim the Gospel, they say: "WOW, I experienced the love of this teacher." Our young people like to have mentors. They look up to us. They say: "That teacher is so kind, so forgiving, so understanding."

My dear brothers and sisters, if no one has ever asked you about your faith, it may mean that you are a poor example. But what about those who are Catholic? For those students who are Catholic, you must give them the Kerygma, because many of our Catholics never experience God. And since they're already Catholic, you must strengthen their spiritual life. What will happen when they receive the Kerygma? The doctrine, in terms of knowledge of the faith and morality, would be lived out and be embedded in their hearts. They will be the salt and light of the school. When Catholic teachers are like salt and light of the school, they will gradually bring about this connection between life and faith. What we say and believe is how we live. And the faith is not just taught, but lived and celebrated in liturgy. Then, others who see this will say: "I also want to know Jesus".

My dear brothers and sisters, let me conclude by saying this: I thank you for coming to this conference. I thank you because you are so important, not only to the Church, but really, to humanity. It's not easy to be a teacher. There are a lot of challenges. It's not easy to be a principal. But, precisely, this is where, we, and especially those who are Catholic teachers, Catholics principals must support each other in the faith and encourage each other. As Catholic schools, as ACCS, we need to strengthen this bond among ourselves so that you can truly bring life. This is my prayer for the Church, my prayer for all of you, because, as I said, I love humanity, I love God. Every young person is important to me. Thank you.