Homily - Catholic Primary Schools Exodus Mass

13 June, 2008 :: St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, Nassau, Bahamas

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8 Matthew 5:13-16

Parents, Relatives and Friends; Teachers, Administrators and Board Members, Beloved all:

I greet most especially our young students who are completing the sixth grade this year.

This morning we are engaged in a custom which is new yet very profound. We call it our "Exodus Mass." It is, we believe, the proper way to mark the completion of your years of primary education. We use the name "Exodus" because it is rich with meaning and it comes straight from the Bible itself. In fact, after the story of CREATION, the EXODUS story is among the first stories told in the Bible.

You know so well what this story is about. It tells of a whole people being given their freedom after many years of slavery. It is the story of Israel out of Egypt. It is one of the outstanding examples of God showing favor and protection and direction to His people. It is a story about a journey of forty years filled with adventure and misadventure but finally ending with a promise fulfilled.

But that is merely the frame and outline of the story of Exodus. The details of the story will show that it is a journey of FREEDOM which is also a journey of FORMATION (Exodus 1-18/19-40). As God frees His people God gives them a rule of life which forms them and fashions their character and tells them who they are and how they ought to live. This rule of life is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17//Deuteronomy 5:6-21). They too are central to the Exodus story.

The word EXODUS means "going out." Literally, it means "the way out." The word EDUCATE, at its root, means "to lead out." It means to lead out of darkness into light. It means to lead out of ignorance into knowledge.

Now, I want to be bold enough as to say that Exodus and Education are two

closely related ideas. They both imply a journey. That journey is a process of formation. That formation is not merely a matter of sharing information but sharing a vision of life.

You students have come to the end of one stage of that journey of formation. It is an early stage but it is an important stage. For you the journey continues.

I like to think that every journey requires at least three things.

- 1. We must know our destination.
- 2. We must pack our bags.
- 3. We must say our goodbyes.

To know our destination means to have a sense of where we are going. It means to have a sense of direction and of purpose. One way we get that sense of direction is by paying attention to what we are good at. What is it that I enjoy doing? What is it that comes naturally to me? In other words, where do my true talents lie?

Our talents, whether they are artistic or scientific or athletic, are an indication of our vocation, our calling in life.

Even at this early stage, dear students, it is not too soon for you to begin to consider what you want to be. It is not too soon for you to consider what you want to do with the time which is your life. It is not too soon for you to learn that it is important not to waste your time.

It is important to work hard and to play and also to pray for God's guidance about the direction your life should take. As the path begins to become clearer and clearer to you, embrace it. Embrace it with the spirit of the young Isaiah who in response to God's call says: "Here I am. Send me." (Isaiah 6:8)

The journey of Exodus and Education demands first that you know your destination. You must think of your vocation in life, your calling.

Next, for this journey you must pack your bags. You must pack the right stuff in your bags. That is, the right attitude and the right values. It is not too soon for you to learn that you should not be quick to look for the easy way out – the short cut. Do not settle for doing the half-way job. Learn to do things right even if it means more work, even if it means hard work.

That is the attitude which should now be forming in your minds.

Also, learn to save. Yes, learn not just to spend your money but to save your money too. It is never too soon for you to learn that.

These are but some of the attitudes and values you need to form on this journey. These elements mold your character and your personality. Your character and personality will influence those around you and in time they will influence our whole community. In that sense you are, as the Gospel says, the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5: 13-14)

So the journey of Exodus and Education demands that you pack your bags with the right attitudes and values and just as important, that you be clear about them.

Finally, this all-important journey brings us to saying goodbyes. We must say goodbye not just to friends and teachers from these primary school years, though that is hard enough. Still more importantly, it is not too soon for you to learn to say goodbye to habits and behaviors which are bad for you and for others.

Do not gossip about others or even encourage that kind of talk. Do not think that you must have what your friends have just in order to feel good.

Most of all, especially the boys, learn to resolve differences without violence. That is hard because we see violence all around us. Still, when you see a conflict arise ask yourself: Can this be solved without violence?

This journey you are on demands your saying goodbye to what is bad for you and saying hello to what is good for you. To do so requires much courage.

So my dear young friends, on this journey you must be aware of your CALL. You must be CLEAR about your values and attitudes. And you must avoid what is bad and do what is good, with COURAGE. Call, Clarity and Courage, this is what this Exodus/Education journey demands of you, even now.

One last thing, young friends. Always have gratitude. Remember, gratitude like happiness was born a twin. If you have it you have to share it. You have to show it. So be grateful to your parents, teachers and friends. Be thankful to all who helped to make your journey up to now the success that it clearly

is.

The best way to do that is to continue this journey of yours attentive to your call, clear about your values and courageous in all that you do.

Congratulations and every blessing be upon you all.