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**International Conference of Christian Teachers - SIESC**

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Holy Mass at the opening of the International Conference - Homily

**1. The language of the Holy Spirit creates communion**

Dear Christian teachers, my sincere thanks to you for bringing together in one family, a communion where no one feels excluded, but is accepted, needed, and receives your attention. Continue to listen to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, who trains man in language, who seeks to build, who discovers in everything what is good, who strives for dialogue and openness in all the diversity of views. Strive for a language that has vision and sustainability, because its validity transcends mere human limits. Seek a language that can listen, understand and avoid moralising; a language that seeks to forgive and to begin again. The language of the Holy Spirit creates communion "*of one heart and one soul"* (cf. Acts 4:32). The Spirit of communion is God among us. In him the victory over the separation of man from man is accomplished. The oppression of man through man ceases. The humiliation of man through man comes to an end. The alienation of man from man is removed. Masters and slaves become brothers... Where such a thing happens, there occurs nothing less than the experience of God Himself. Which God? God among us, the communicative God, the Holy Spirit. Thus, we step out of our loneliness into a common life. Our fears of others and our aggressions, our aggressiveness, become ridiculous, because there is enough of everything for everyone. God alone is there for all.

**2. Learning is a joyful expectation of self**

Today with this Holy Mass we begin the International Conference of Christian teachers I would like to highlight a thought from the Interview with Peter Sloterdijk for 14. McKinsey Wissen issue dedicated to education (*Lernen ist Vorfreude auf sich selbst,* Learning is a joyful expectation of oneself; 2009), which contains key thoughts that should address and call to reflection educators in the whole vertical of school and education, from kindergartens to universities. "Teachers are people who often believe that it is always better to explain something than to do something It is becoming clearer and clearer that we cannot get close to the core of learning by traditional school means (...) At the same time, children, pupils, students bring their curiosity, their enthusiasm, that priceless medium of joyful self-expectation to the learning process. This joyful anticipation of their own next stage is precisely what is expected and from which the "learning libido" can emerge as a real personal and social capital. And a didactic that respects this is quite different from a school in which teachers gesture: *'You're going to be amazed, and I'll be the one to show you."*

Do teachers know that they are educating children for today and "what" they are educating them for, if they are educating them at all? Is there room in the modern school for the whole person, or only for his factual, social, internet and competitive outlets? What is the relation of contemporary didactics to the original human autodidactics? Is learning a "joyful anticipation of oneself", of one's future states, abilities, outlooks and choices, gifts, surprises of the unexpected, or rather the negative of all this?

**3. The heart speaks to the heart**

How to find a solution to these questions? A very instructive and wonderful example in this regard is John Henry Newman, who was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on his visit to the United Kingdom. Titles, doctorates and other references are of no help if the teacher, educator or professor is not first and foremost a person who is a personality, who tries to live what he says, who radiates first and foremost the very harmony of being that is the best "pedagogical method". Newman said it in a straightforward, inspired way. His thought, which originated in the 19th century, is increasingly relevant and is a good starting point for taking these words seriously at the beginning of the school year and asking ourselves how much we are living them, how much they are really our 'pedagogy'?

"The heart speaks to the heart" - "Cor ad cor loquitur" - Newman found this saying, which was a fundamental guiding principle of his life, in St Francis de Sales, in a long letter written by the saint to the Bishop of Bourges in 1604. Discussing preaching, Francis writes, among other things, "Our words should come from the heart rather than from the lips. After all, it is the heart that speaks to the heart, the mouth speaks only to the ears... The fathers of old, and all who have borne fruit, (...) spoke from heart to heart, as good fathers speak to their children. Persons influence us, the voice constrains us, the gaze controls us, actions inflame us."

The personality of the teacher, the educator, is always at the centre of education. If one does not have something, if one does not live what one teaches oneself, then one has nothing to give to others, one cannot awaken in them a joyful expectation of oneself. That is why Newman always stressed the irreplaceable role of the teacher, his witness, his being. This is also how he understood the role of the tutor at Oriel College, Oxford. *"Truth enters the mind of the disciple through the eyes and ears, through the emotions, the imagination and the intellect"*. No school system can function successfully without the personal influence of teachers. "*Where there is (personal) influence, there is life; where there is none, there is no life. (...) A school system without the personal influence of teachers on students is like the polar cold and will produce an icy, petrified and rigid education, nothing else*", Newman wrote.

The cardinal's motto "*The heart speaks to the heart",* which Newman chose, sheds light on his conception of preaching, teaching and education. It reminds us of the importance he attached to friends and community, to the primacy of the personality, to the emphasis on the wholeness of the human person. The heart speaks to the heart, the heart of God to the heart of man - in the incarnation of the Son of God and in the sacramental life of the Church. The human heart speaks to the hearts of others who are seeking faith, seeking to live more fully, to rejoice in themselves, or who are tormented by doubts. Such a heart was in Newman's breast and spoke to countless hearts in the schools and universities of Oxford, Birmingham, Dublin and Rome in his time, and it speaks with unobtrusive power to the people of our time. Will we all reflect a little on this guide and ask ourselves whether we are just talking about something, or is that what we are? True pedagogy begins in our hearts, in the glow of our being - and this is what really stimulates in children, pupils, students the goal of our teaching and education, namely that "*learning is the joyful expectation of oneself*"!

**4. To teach and educate for the European project of democracy**

The success of the European project depends not only on economic integration and scientific and technological progress, but also on the acceptance of a set of fundamental rights and values, such as human dignity, human rights, freedom, non-discrimination, the common good, subsidiarity, justice, tolerance, inclusiveness, solidarity and equality, and freedom of religion, which underpin democracy and ensure its proper functioning.

Democracy without values can easily turn into totalitarianism or authoritarianism. Today's threats to democracy in Europe stem from the erosion of the shared values of the European project. The crisis or deficit of democracy is the result of a wider crisis of values. In the elections, European citizens can voice their concerns and opinions on how values are being implemented in the European space and cast their vote responsibly to promote higher standards of values to strengthen democracy. This civic consciousness of participatory democracy is the guarantee and continuation of Europe as a community of values.

The values on which democracy is based have Christian roots. The Catholic Church, as an important stakeholder in European society, cannot remain indifferent to the coming democratic process, because it is about the dignity of every European citizen, human rights, justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. The Church values the democratic system because it ensures the participation of citizens in political decision-making, which requires those who govern them to be responsible for safeguarding, protecting and implementing the values without which genuine democracy would be undermined.

May the Holy Spirit inspire all participants in the International Conference to respond with courage and hope to the challenges of contemporary society. May you be especially inspired in these days by Pope Francis' thoughts in his encyclical We Are All Brothers: *"Man is so created that he can only fulfil himself, develop and reach fullness 'through the sincere sacrifice of himself. Nor can he fully know his own truth unless he encounters others: 'I cannot speak successfully to myself except by the standards by which I speak to others. Therefore, no one can experience the value of life without loving a concrete fellow human being. This is the secret of authentic human existence, for life is where there is "companionship", community, fraternity; this life is stronger than death if it is rooted in true acquaintances and companionships."*