



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS FROM SCHOOLS ACROSS ITALY

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 10 May 2014*

[Video](#)

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Dear Friends, Good afternoon!

First of all I thank you, for you have done something truly beautiful! This meeting is very good: a great meeting of Italian schools, the whole school: young and old; teachers, staff, students and parents; State and non-State schools.... I thank Cardinal Bagnasco, Minister Giannini and all those who have collaborated; and these truly beautiful, important testimonies. I heard so many beautiful things, which have done me so much good! It is clear that this rally is not “against”, it is “for”! It is not a complaint, it is a celebration! A celebration of school. We are well aware that there are problems and things that are not going well, we know this. But you are here, we are here because we love school; and I say “we”, because I love school. I loved it as a pupil, as a student and as a teacher. And then as Bishop. In the Diocese of Buenos Aires I often met with the world of education, and today I thank you for having organized this meeting, which is not confined to Rome but includes all of Italy. I thank you very much for this. Thank you!

Why do I love school? I will try to tell you. I have an image in mind. I heard here that we do not grow up alone, and that there is always a gaze that helps us to grow. I have a mental picture of my first teacher, that lady, my teacher at the age of six in first grade. I have never forgotten her. She made me love school. And then I went to see her throughout her life, until she passed way at the age of 98. And this image does me good! I love school, because that woman taught me to love it. This is the first reason why I love school.

I love school because it is synonymous with openness to reality. At least it should be! Yet it does not always manage to be so, and so that means that the structure needs to be adapted a little. Going to school means opening one's mind and heart to reality, in the wealth of its aspects, of its dimensions. And we do not have the right to be afraid of reality! School teaches us to understand reality. Going to school means opening one's mind and heart to reality, in the wealth of its aspects, of its dimensions. And this is so very beautiful! In the first years we learn a wide range of subjects, then little by little one delves more deeply into one subject and then ultimately specializes in it. But if one has learned how to learn — this is the secret, to learn how to learn! — one retains this always, a person remains open to reality! This is what a great Italian educator, who was a priest, also taught: Don Lorenzo Milani.

Teachers are the first ones who must remain open to reality — I heard the testimony of your teachers; it pleased me to see them so open to reality — with minds still open to learning! For if a teacher is not open to learning, he or she is not a good teacher and isn't even interesting; young people understand that, they have a "nose" for it, and they are attracted by professors whose thoughts are open, "unfinished", who are seeking something "more", and thus they infect students with this attitude. This is one of the reasons why I love school.

Another reason is that school is a place of encounter. For we are all on a journey, beginning a process, on our way down a road. And I heard that school — we all heard it today — is not a parking lot. It is a meeting place along the way. We meet our peers; we meet teachers; we meet the staff. Parents meet the professors; the principal meets the families, etc. It is a place of encounter. And we today need this culture of encounter in order to get to know one another, to love one another, to journey together. And this is fundamental precisely in the years of growth and development, as a complement to the family. The family is the first core for relationships: the relationship with one's father and mother and with one's brothers and sisters is the basis, and it always accompanies us in life. But at school we "socialize": we meet people who are different from us, different in age, culture, roots, abilities. School is the first society that integrates the family. Family and school should never be opposed! They are complementary, and therefore it is important that they cooperate in mutual respect. And families of the children in one class can do a great deal by jointly cooperating among themselves and with the teachers. This makes me think of a very nice African proverb which goes: "It takes a village to raise a child". It takes many people to educate and form a young person: family, teachers, staff, professors, everyone! Do you like this African proverb? So you like it? Let us say it together: It takes a village to raise a child! Together! It takes a village to raise a child! Think about this.

And then I love school because it educates us in the true, the good and the beautiful. All three go together. Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; it either enriches or impoverishes; it either makes a person develop or depresses him, it can even corrupt him. And what we heard today is so important in education: a clean defeat is always better than a dirty victory! Remember this! This will benefit you throughout life. Let us say it together: a clean defeat

is always better than a dirty victory. All together! A clean defeat is always better than a dirty victory!

A school's mission is to develop the sense of the true, the sense of the good and the sense of the beautiful. And this happens through a rich journey made up of many "ingredients". That is why there are so many subjects! Because development is the result of various elements which interact and stimulate the mind, the conscience, the affections, the body, etc. For example, if I study this Square, St Peter's Square, I learn something about architecture, history, religion, even astronomy — the obelisk recalls the sun, you see few people know that this square is also a large sundial.

Thus we cultivate within ourselves the true, the good and the beautiful; and we learn that these three dimensions are never separated but rather are interwoven. If something is true, it is good and it is beautiful; if something is beautiful, it is good and it is true; if it is good, it is true and it is beautiful. And together these elements make us grow and help us to love life, even when we are unwell, even amid difficulties. True education makes us love life, and it opens us to the fullness of life!

And finally I would like to say that at school we not only acquire knowledge and content, but we also learn deportment and values. One is educated to learn many things, that is, much important content, in order to behave in a certain way and also adopt values. And this is very important. I wish you all — parents, teachers, people who work in the schools, students — a beautiful journey at school, a journey that enables you to learn three languages that a mature person should know how to express: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands. Harmoniously though, that is, to think what you feel and what you do; to feel deeply what you think and what you do; and to do well what you think and what you feel. Three languages, together in harmony! Thank you again to the organizers of this day, and to all of you who have come. And please please, never let us allow our love for school to be stolen from us! Thank you.