

Archbishop Lori's Homily: School Mass and Blessing of Grotto; St. Augustine

School Mass and Blessing of Grotto

St. Augustine School

Sept. 6, 2019

A Word of Greeting

I am happy to be here with you today for the opening week of the new school year. I would like to greet Father John Williamson, your pastor, as well as your Principal, Mrs. Denise Ball, and your Assistant Principal, Mr. Joseph Miller, together with the dedicated faculty here at St. Augustine School. I am delighted also to see so many parents here today as well; thank you for choosing a Catholic education for your sons and daughters! Most of all, I greet all of you students! You're the reason we are here today to celebrate this Mass and to bless the beautiful new grotto dedicated to Our Blessed Lady.

The Parable of the New and the Old

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story about new and old cloth and new and old wineskins. Jesus does this because his opponents, the Scribes and Pharisees, compared and contrasted the disciples of John the Baptist and his own disciples. They said that John the Baptist's disciples fasted and prayed but Jesus' disciples were seen eating and drinking. John's disciples were repenting; Jesus' disciples were rejoicing! What gives?

The point here is that everything is different in our life because of Jesus. That is why Jesus compares himself to a bridegroom and the eating and drinking of his disciples to the celebration of a wedding. And this is what Jesus wants us to understand: When Jesus the Son of God came down from heaven and became one of us, God, in special way, "wed" himself, "married" himself, to us. So we say that Jesus is the

Groom and his Church is his Bride. That gives us some idea of how much Jesus loves us as members of his Church. And that's why we too should rejoice and celebrate: Jesus unites himself to us! Jesus really does love us!

Of course, the Scribes and Pharisees weren't convinced of this so Jesus told them two stories to illustrate why he makes all things new and why we should rejoice in his presence. The first one was about an old garment with a big hole in it. If you try to fix the old garment by sewing on a new piece of cloth, it won't work. Not only will the new cloth not match the old cloth, but when you wash it, the new cloth will shrivel up and tear away from the old. Both the old cloth and the new cloth are ruined. Jesus wants to clothe us, not with an old garment that's been patched, but with a whole new life of grace and holiness. He does merely try to patch up our sinful life but rather to make us brand new!

The second story is about wineskins - and we have stretch our imagination here because today wine comes in bottles, not in wineskins, as it did 2000 years ago. So, when wine is new it is still fermenting and it needs to expand, its volume grows. If you put the fermenting in new wineskins, they are supple enough to stretch so as to make room the expanding new wine. But old wineskins are already stretched and couldn't expand anymore. If you put new wine was put into them, they won't be able to contain it. Instead, they will rupture - with the result that both the wine and wineskins will be lost. And what is Jesus telling us here? He's not really talking about wine and wineskins but about the capacity of our hearts to receive his love. Jesus' love is new, expansive, and overflowing. We need a new heart and a new spirit - a heart that enlarges more and more - as God's love is poured into it by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5).

Application to Students at the Beginning of a New Year

So what is Jesus telling you and me as a new school year begins? He's telling us first of all how much he loves us. Don't ever forget that. Sometimes when we feel bad or things are not going well we can forget that Jesus truly loves us more than anyone else. Even though he lived a long time ago and now is in heaven, Jesus is also very close to you and me, very near to us, and he wants not only to be with us but also to live in us.

But we have to do our part too. We have to get ready to receive Jesus. So if we don't even try to do the right thing or deliberately choose what is bad, then we are living what the Bible calls the old life of sin. We are like an old garment with a big hole in it. Jesus doesn't just want to patch it up but clothe us with his life and love. He wants us to be free from sin so that we can shine with the glory of his Risen Life. Or, to put it another way, he wants to come and live in our soul, in our hearts. But he doesn't want to live in a heart that is angry, resentful, or stingy. He wants to live in a heart that is loving and good – a new heart, a good heart, a generous heart. So with God's help we have to enlarge our hearts – to make them big and supple enough to receive his love.

And that's the beauty of your Catholic education. You are attending a truly excellent school with top-notch academics and that's good. But it is also a place where you learn how much Jesus loves you; how Jesus comes to you in Scripture, in the Church's teaching and in the Sacraments; and how the Lord wants to help you become that person you are meant to be – a person who rejoices in the Lord's love and lives the new life of grace that he came to bring us. This means that you will be stretched and challenged and sometimes you will find it difficult. But opening our hearts and living as Jesus taught is the ultimate secret to your happiness, now and in the future.

So my prayer is that you will have a wonderful school year, in which you grow in every way possible – in knowledge, in skill, in your ability to relate well to your parents, brothers and sisters, your teachers, your classmates and everyone else in your life – but above all in your ability to relate well to the Lord who loves you more than you could ever imagine! And let's not forget to ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us in the year ahead. More than any other person she was clothed with the glory of God's love, more than any other heart, hers was filled with grace. May she pray for you today and every day of the year that lies ahead, and may God bless you and keep you always in his love!