Landas 30:1 (2016) 5–8

GREETINGS FROM THE CBCP*

Roberto C. Mallari, D.D.
Bishop of San Jose de Nueva Ecija and Chairperson,
Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education

Your Eminence, Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education; your Eminence, Orlando Cardinal Quevedo, Archbishop of Cotabato, Chairman of the Episcopal Commission on the Doctrine of the Faith; your Excellency, Most Rev. Giuseppe Pinto, Papal Nuncio to the Philippines; the president of the Loyola School of Theology, the Very Rev. Jose V. C. Quilongquilong of the Society of Jesus; distinguished members of the academic community of the Loyola School of Theology and Loyola House of Studies, my brothers and sisters in the Lord, especially our dearest students: praise be Jesus Christ, now and forever!

I greet all of you with a warm embrace in the name of my brother bishops of the Conference, in particular, the Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education.

Your Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, your visit in our country and Church is most auspicious! It is thus very favorable and encouraging. We see this once again as a ray of light emanating from the See of Peter. The visit of Pope Francis last year continues to inspire us even up to this day.

---

*Delivered on the first day of the LST International Theological Symposium (Henry Lee Irwin Theater, Ateneo de Manila University: March 10, 2016).

The year 2016 is a blessed year. It is not only the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy but also a year dedicated by the Church in the Philippines as the Year of the Eucharist and the Family.

The Pastoral Letter issued by the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines to celebrate the year created a beautiful tapestry under the theme "On Bended Knees." That as a nation and Church, we need to renew our faith "on bended knees." That "on bended knees" we are able to ask forgiveness for our faults and offenses. That "on bended knees" we are able to adore Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. That "on bended knees" we are able to see Jesus and serve Him in one another, especially the poor, through our engagement in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

It is also a special year for Catholic education in our country. The association of Catholic schools known as the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) is celebrating its 75th year of foundation. Borne out of the heart of a bishop, the Most Rev. Michael O'Doherty of Manila, the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines has created communion and impelled schools to collective mission in our country.

We are on holy ground! Because we are in a school, in a university where the encounter with Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life happens everyday. It is in this place, like so many other schools, colleges, and universities in the country, where engagement to learning and dialogue of life and faith takes place. There are more than 1,200 Catholic schools, colleges, and universities in our country today. They are owned and administered by dioceses and religious institutes and congregations.

And with pride and joy, I say with my brother bishops in this august body

- that the Catholic schools have been a sure and reliable agent of evangelization; it is in schools that systematic and programmed instruction in the faith happens;

- that the Catholic schools have provided quality education while relying on their own resources; when government and public schools were yet wanting, Catholic schools were centers of learning in the islands;
- that the Catholic schools have been custodians and promoters of music, arts, and culture; they have been depositories of our rich tradition;
- that the Catholic schools have been extended arms of the Church as they opened their doors to the marginalized: the handicapped, the poor, the orphans, and the out of school youth;
- that the Catholic schools have been a ready support to the advocacies of the Church;
- that the Catholic schools have been a ready resource in times of calamities and tragedies.

We reaffirm the validity and the necessity of our Catholic schools, for what will the Philippines be without the Catholic schools?

Moreover, let it be said that the heart of Catholic education is catechesis, the transmission of the Christian Faith to the young people of our country. After all, in the spirit of the New Evangelization, the encounter with Jesus is the starting point for an effective and worthwhile Christian education in our schools. While excellence is priority for a school, the pursuit for excellence is transformed by a commitment to make saints out of our students.

We have produced the best graduates in our schools. We hope that we can form future saints … "beatifiable" and "canonizable" men and women for others, achievers for God and country!

The Pastoral Letter of the bishops' conference in 2012 commemorating four hundred years of Catholic education in the country illustrates these challenges and gains of Catholic education.

Your Eminence Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, my deep and humble gratitude for your visit. Please give the Holy Father our warm greeting of love and fidelity. Thank you and good morning!