

**BLESSING OF RALSTON BUILDING**

**ST FRANCIS DE SALES COLLEGE**

**13 MARCH 2007**



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Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ,  
Auxiliary Bishop of Adelaide

The Gospel I have just read about the mustard seed is a good one for St Francis De Sales College, a College still fresh with newness, and like the mustard seed, growing from a small thing to something larger. Able at first to care only for a few, but growing to be able to care for more, like the birds of the air, as the Gospel says. There is a saying, like the mustard seed, *“that great oaks from small acorns grow”*. This is a school just nine years old, but you are making your impact, and looking at where we are, there is also the other Gospel phrase that *“a city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden”*. So to all the students and staff of this College of St Francis De Sales, we add the further Gospel line, *“so therefore let your light shine before others”*.

Students of St Francis De Sales, you are called to be points of light, not points of darkness, in your world. We have 800 students at the College now. Imagine this scene. You are in a darkened gymnasium, or you are in the Festival Theatre, and there are no lights on, or you are in the Adelaide Town Hall, and it is pitch-black. You are frightened to move around in case you stumble over something. Then you manage to light one candle. Just one candle. See how it can dispel the darkness. Imagine how much darkness will be dispelled by 800 candles. That is what Our Lord is getting at when He tells you, *“You are the light of the world”*.

Doing a good thing like starting a school, is like throwing a pebble in a pond. We do not know where the ripples will go, and what impact they will have. St Francis De Sales was born in a time when nobody had ever heard of Australia. He would have been astonished to learn that one day he would be known as a Saint, and that a school in a land he had never heard of, on the other side of the Earth, would one day be named after him, and claim him as a model. When good people throw a pebble in a pond, no one but God can know how far the ripples for good will go.

We are praying for a blessing on this school, so that through it, the wider community might itself be blessed. A school reinforces the local community. A school is a centre of inclusion, it is a gathering place of families, as parents and students and teachers gather it is a place of communication and reinforcement, community building. A school is a zone of young life and zest, and for all attached to it, a school

is a pointer of hope to the future. To start a school helps build a community; to close a school grievously wounds a community.

In the Prayer of the Faithful Mrs Griffith will read today, it asks that your school be a place where the students and teachers thirst for wisdom, delight in learning, and strive to share your gifts with the wider community.

There are two adages about schools. One is that “*when you open a school, you close a prison*”. The other is, what the Jesuit Father General once said, that “*in regimes hostile to the Church all that has been necessary to do to harm her has been to close the Catholic Schools*”.

What do those adages mean – to open a school is to close a prison? A school won’t close a prison unless its pupils as old scholars work for justice and fairness for all, and for a moral society. In other words, more than just knowledge is needed if a school is to be successful, if a Catholic school is to achieve its mission.

And to close a Catholic school would not harm the Church if that school was not transmitting a lively and faithful Catholic culture, where Christ is at its centre, and the Eucharist is esteemed and observed profoundly by all, teachers especially included. If a Catholic school is not living its mission in the Church, then to close it would in no way harm the Church. It is a challenge for us to be what we should be as a Catholic school, linking knowledge with virtue, knowledge with faith and good works.

Look at the opening prayer for this ceremony.

I hope all of you students in class will have the opportunity to tease out that prayer, to try to work out what it means for you. It is a prayer that the College be a place of wisdom and endeavour, of faith and friendship, that the teaching and learning that goes on here will encourage peace, joy, justice and hope. It is a prayer that you see clearly, judge wisely, and love what is true, and support the good and noble. That is why this school exists.

So the first major point is that knowledge and virtue must be linked, if you are to be true as a Catholic school. Knowledge by itself is not enough. Many of the Nazi leaders were very highly educated men, and yet they put into place the horrors of gas chambers and extermination. Knowledge by itself is not enough; it must be linked to virtue.

In 1552, St Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, wrote explaining why he wanted his Order to found schools. Those schools became the first international system of colleges in the world. He wrote, *“our present students will in time assume various roles, some in the religious life, some in the government of the land and in the administration of justice, others in all sorts of responsible occupations. For the children of today become the adults of tomorrow, so their good formation in life and learning will benefit many others, with the good results of that spreading more widely every day, to the greater glory and service of God Our Lord.”* There you have the ripple effect, spreading out, and the investment in the future, for the children of today become the adults of tomorrow, and the linking of good formation in life and learning. He wrote that this will *“benefit many others”*. One of the pupils at one of those early Jesuit schools was Francis De Sales. Look what he did with his life, and how his holiness and learning have benefited many others. The mustard seed grows, more candles will dispel even greater darkness.

So if the school is to produce young men and women matching its ideals, then knowledge must be linked not only to virtue, but to a sense of mission, so that the existence of this school *“will benefit many others”*.

And look whom you have in your model, St Francis De Sales. He is one of the special Saints who has won the affection of the people. Like St Francis of Assisi, he is one of the most loved of Saints. Part of the reason is his gentleness and open goodness and commitment to others. There are four features of St Francis De Sales that might inspire all you students of this College.

Firstly, he committed himself to his studies and earned his Doctorate at the age of 23, and could have gone on to a brilliant academic career, but decided to dedicate those

talents for the sake of others. Talents must be developed, and they must be geared for the good of others.

Secondly, there was his gentleness and non-violence. His book, *“The Introduction to the Devout Life”* became a classic immediately. It reflects his own holiness, his centreing on Christ.

Thirdly, he was committed to the poor. When the French King offered him a rich bishopric in France, he replied *“Sir, I have married a poor wife and cannot desert her for a richer one”*.

Fourthly, it is interesting to note that it was an age of corruption and ignorance in the Church when St Francis De Sales flourished, there was ignorance and corruption, but it was also an era of Saints, trying to do something about it. In his own lifetime, Francis De Sales mixed with the man who became St Vincent de Paul, the one who became St Robert Bellarmine, and the one who became St Jean Francis de Chantelle. These were all Saints doing what they could to tackle the evil that was around them, in the Church and without.

In this blessing ceremony, we are about now to carry the Crucifixes into this new building. There is no point in doing this if you are just going to carry the Crucifixes in and hang them on the wall, and that’s where they stay. We must also carry the Crucifixes out, in your heart, take from this school what you have learnt, that God so loved us, that He gave us his only Son, and that we are to be Christ in the world, for others.

And so I end with this prayer for you:-

***Lord, circle this school  
and keep these goods things within:***

*Eagerness to learn,  
space to grow,  
flowering of talents.*

*A sense of wonder,  
appreciation of beauty,*

*great dreams and desires for “the more”.*

***Lord, circle this school  
And keep these goods things within:***

*The art of listening,  
respect for all,  
service of others.*

*Stage, art and music,  
warmth of friendship,  
contribution to the team.*

***Lord, circle this school  
and keep these goods things within:***

*Care for the earth,  
reverence for life,  
compassion on all.*

*Breadth of experience,  
time for reflection,  
boldness in action.*

***Lord, circle this school  
and keep these goods things within:***

*In all things, a harmony of head, heart and hands.  
In all things, finding You.*

*May you be Lord of our hearts, mover of our spirits; may we be signs of your  
presence in Christ’s love for others.*

*Lord, circle this school  
for you are the source of all that is good and right and true.*

*Amen.*

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*Bishop G. J. O’Kelly, SJ  
Auxiliary Bishop of Adelaide*