

**Homily for the Mass Celebrating All Catholic Schools of Quincy
Tuesday, September 26, 2023 | Memorial of Saints Cosmas and Damian**

**Quincy Notre Dame High School
Quincy, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brother priests and deacons, seminarians, men and women religious, parents, faculty, staff, and students of the Catholic Schools of Quincy, brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you to celebrate this Mass together as we survey the history and dynamism of Catholic life and education in the city of Quincy, Illinois. We stand at a decisive moment of hope through the collaboration between Saint Peter, Blessed Sacrament, Saint Francis Solanus, and Saint Dominic Catholic Schools. I am very pleased, but not at all surprised, that Quincy is the place where there is a clear realization that we are stronger together than we are apart. This collaborative vision is one that I and the curia staff wholeheartedly support, and have been laboring with the pastors of Quincy to bring about for the past couple of years. We are confident that together, we can create a vibrant and sustainable foundation for Catholic families and their children.

This re-conception of Catholic education at the primary level, along with the support of the Diocese, Quincy Notre Dame High School, and Quincy University, opens the possibility that students here could have an academically rigorous education founded on Catholic faith and morals, from Pre-K through a college degree. Imagine the potential, the bright future we can forge for generations to come in Quincy, by bringing faith and reason together for the entire course of our students' academic and spiritual formation. Thanks to the cooperation of many individuals and institutions, we look forward joyfully to Catholic education's next 100 years in Quincy, building on over a century of experience, growth and grace.

I welcome Father John Doctor, O.F.M., Vice-President for Mission and Ministry at Quincy University; Mr. Mark McDowell, Principal of Quincy Notre Dame High School; Dr. Mark Newcomb, Diocesan Director for Catholic Education; Mrs. Brandi Borries, Diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools; Monsignor Leo Enlow, Pastor of Saint Peter Parish; Father Tom Meyer, Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish; Father Steven Arisman, Pastor of Saint Francis Solanus Parish; and Father Thomas Donavan, Pastor of Saint Anthony Parish. We are very excited that you have chosen to work together, with the support and guidance of diocesan leadership and the

administrative expertise of Dr. Christopher Gill, for setting Catholic education on a sure path towards a bright future here in Quincy.

This undertaking is in keeping with the forward-thinking heritage of Quincy, where America's first African-American Catholic Priest, Venerable Father Augustine Tolton, lived, served, and is buried.

Our scripture readings for today evoke the joy, the hope, and the fidelity of our revisioning of Catholic education here in Quincy. In fact, they seem to have been chosen to mark this occasion as we reflect on the ways that God invites us to be co-creators and co-healers with Him in the world. From the Prophet Ezra, we heard of the completion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, a period of renewal and encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the rebuilding of the House of Yahweh on Temple Mount. Just as this new era of collaboration among the parishes and educational institutions of Quincy is the work of many minds and hands, we learn that Darius, Cyrus, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia, supported the work of the Elders of the Jewish people in rebuilding the House of God. The toil of the laborers was supported by the taxes of those living West of the Euphrates.

Let us be inspired by this example of common work, administrative oversight, careful planning, and fiscal support for a religious undertaking of

our forebears in the faith, as we move forward towards the founding of Quincy Catholic Schools.

May we, as we just declared in the responsorial Psalm, “Go rejoicing to the House of the Lord,” knowing that our contributions to our individual communities of worship are contributing to a common work of faith for all Catholic students in Quincy. For, as we learn from Luke’s Gospel this morning, it is those who hear and carry out the precepts of the Word of God that become true brothers and sisters of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The kinship of our common faith, our standing together in carrying out corporal and spiritual works of mercy in a Creation originally made good yet broken by human sin, is what distinguishes us from those who live for worldly glory. Our call is to reach higher and to know that all people are made in the image and likeness of God. We renew this image in our souls when we call upon the Holy Spirit to come and enliven us so that we can be a source of healing and solace to those being mistreated in the world.

For our students who are gathered here today, you may think that this message of witness and growth in the Lord is merely for the grownups who are assembled for this Eucharist, but it is also you who have the power to bring Christ’s comfort and encouragement to His brothers and sisters.

When a classmate makes a cutting remark about a friend, the choice is before you, to be either a brother and sister to Christ or to remain silent. When your virtual “friends” are sharing something online that does not promote human dignity, you decide whether you will witness to the Gospel, or let something harmful or offensive be distributed to more people.

This consistent focus on how to strive for and build up a community of virtue and holiness must be the very cornerstone of our new foundation for Catholic education in Quincy. Public schools have financial resources far beyond what we can command in their self-proclaimed mission of “college and career readiness” for students. We must prepare for a life beyond materialism, because money and things do not make a person happy, despite what the world tells us. No – those who become true brothers and sisters of Christ realize at some point in their journey that the most important thing is to be ready to meet and dwell with God. It is great that parents and families want to see their children succeed in this life. Let us also place as much concern on eternal life as we do the professional life of our Catholic young people. In the words of the motto of the Department for Catholic Education for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois: *Sapientia Christi, sana animas nostras* – which is Latin for: Wisdom of Christ, heal our souls!

Today, we also commemorate the witness of Saints Cosmas and Damian, twin brothers who were renowned physicians when they were martyred under the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, in the early fourth century. Their abilities as healers and surgeons were so widely acclaimed that they were already famous by worldly standards before their martyrdom. Thousands were restored to health by their skill, yet they did all of their work on behalf of those suffering from paralysis, blindness, or fever without charging any fee for their services. For this reason, they were called “silverless” or “unmercenaries,” winning many souls to Christ and the Catholic faith. By all measures of earthly success, Cosmas and Damian were blessed beyond measure. They were adroit, revered, and could have amassed a great fortune if they had chosen earthly over heavenly treasure. Yet despite threats, imprisonment, and torture, they would not recant their faith. They decided that the gift of Heaven and eternal life with God was the highest good, and held firm in their witness to Christ and the Gospel. They decided that “the life of the world to come,” that Catholics prepare for at each Mass in the recitation of the Creed, was the real prize, beyond skill, fame, or fortune.

As with so many moments during the new journey we have begun together as Quincy Catholic Schools, it is clear to me that this momentous day has been willed by the Lord for the beginning of a great, new work in which He seeks our faithful response. Wisdom of Christ, heal our souls!

May God give us this grace. Amen.