

# Catholic Schools

## Bishop celebrates Mass for St. Francis feast day

By CITLALLI SANTIAGO

FAIRFIELD—On the morning of the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano celebrated Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. The students, along with their families and friends, were in attendance, gathering to hear the word of the Lord. With every pew filled, the school choir led the people with hymns such as “Prayer of St. Francis” and “Christ Be Our Light.”

St. Francis of Assisi is best known as the saint who loved all God’s creatures. He was also known for his life of poverty and humility. Born into a wealthy family, as his father was a merchant, St. Francis gave up everything he had and lived among

the poor because of his profound love of the Lord Jesus. He later founded the Franciscan Order in the early 13th century.

During Bishop Caggiano’s homily, he asked St. Thomas’ students, “What can St. Francis teach us so that you and I can live ever more faithful to Jesus as he did in a world different than the world St. Francis lived in? There are at least three things he can teach us.”

For the first lesson, Bishop Caggiano asked the children to raise their hands if they had pets, and many did. He then asked if they loved their pets; again, many raised their hands. He said, “Boys and girls, your pet is a gift ... St. Francis is famous for loving animals ... because St. Francis knew

that the animals of this world—even ones that are not pets, even ones that are wild—are a gift from God.”

He explains that St. Francis also loved everything around us, such as the sun, the moon, and the stars. He was grateful for many things, like the water he drank, the air he breathed, the food he ate and all the blessings God gave, ensuring he made time to thank God in his prayers and sing God’s glory for all those blessings.

“St. Francis teaches us to be grateful for everything we have, even the littlest of things,” the bishop said.

To begin the second lesson, Bishop Caggiano asked the students what they thought of when



they said “Christmas.” Many responses were “presents,” “the Christmas tree,” and “the decorations.” He then asked, “What is the most special decoration you could put up at Christmas time?” And a young boy responded, “The nativity scene.”

Bishop Caggiano explained that St. Francis of Assisi created the first nativity scene, also called a crèche.

“In Assisi, he created a crèche, a manger scene, huge and beautiful, to remind everyone of the greatest gift God gave us: Jesus the Lord,” said Bishop Caggiano. “He came as our savior and redeemer. Not in glory, not in power, not with an army. He came in poverty, in a manger with only the animals and his mother and foster father to welcome him.”

Bishop Caggiano stressed that everything about St. Francis always leads to Jesus because he knew that with Jesus, he had everything, and without him, we have nothing.

“Lesson number two, boys and girls, is to pray always to Jesus,” he said, ending the lesson by saying that during the season of Christmas, the greatest gift we will receive is Jesus.

Lastly, the third lesson began with Bishop Caggiano telling the children to look at their hands.

“Jesus’ hands looked like this until he was crucified,” the bishop said. “And when Jesus rose

from the dead, his hands had a special mark on them.”

Bishop Caggiano explained that the holes in Jesus’s hands were called the stigmata, and many had been given the stigmata signs throughout the centuries.

The stigmata were “signs, literally holes in their hands and feet and their side, given as a gift, even though it was very painful, to remind them and us that to follow Jesus demands sacrifice,” the bishop said.

According to the bishop, St. Francis was one of the greatest saints to receive them. In doing so, he reminded the people of his time and ours that following Jesus would not be easy and would require sacrifice.

“The Lord will ask you to be good and obedient...it means you’ll speak the truth and never use your tongue to hurt anyone else,” Bishop Caggiano said to the students. “St. Francis reminds us to be grateful above all for Jesus, who is our greatest gift, and not be afraid to do what’s hard for him.”

Bishop Caggiano gave the formula for becoming holy through these three lessons.

“It has been said that no one since the life of St. Francis has lived as holy as he did,” the bishop said. “Let us prove that wrong, and let you and I strive to live like St. Francis did, and show the world that there are those who are willing to love Jesus forever.”

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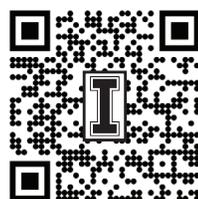
November 15

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