International Community in Pune celebrates Holy Mass for the Opening of the School Year

A special service marking the beginning of the new school year brought together families from different countries in Pune on Sunday, September 13. People from Germany, France, Korea, Zimbabwe and other countries gathered for an international service celebrated in English.

After an ecumenical service at the Emmaus Chapel in Delhi on Sept. 12, I flew to Pune on Sunday morning. Tobias Gabriel warmly welcomed me at the airport. Over breakfast on a beautiful balcony in Panchshil Towers, the day began with a joyful sense of fellowship and anticipation.

Families began to arrive in the hall around 11 a.m. The music, led by Tobias Gabriel and his children, as well as Etienne, his wife and their children, gave the service a joyful and festive atmosphere. The readings from the Book of Sirach, the Letter to the Romans and the Sermon on the Mount focused our attention on the source of true wisdom.

A particularly moving moment was the Lord's Prayer. Although the service was celebrated in English, each person prayed the Lord's Prayer in his or her own mother tongue. Thus, one prayer was heard in many languages – a beautiful expression of the diversity and unity of the international community.

One of the most touching moments was the blessing of the children; they brought their school bags, books, notebooks, pencils and pens to the altar. Together with the bread and wine, these everyday symbols of school life were brought before God - learning, school, the questions and hopes of children have their place in their life with God. We prayed for God's blessing for the new school year, for joy in learning, good friendships and people who will accompany and encourage the children on their journey.

The homily reflected on the insight that wisdom does not come only from books and academic knowledge. Education opens many opportunities for children and young people. Yet our experiences in life also shape us – our encounters, joys and disappointments, successes and difficulties. We can learn to understand these experiences and grow through them. Wisdom is more than knowledge. It is expressed in the way we live our lives, take responsibility, distinguish between good and evil, and treat others with respect and love.

At the end of the celebration, there was a strong sense of joy and gratitude among those present. The service gave the beginning of the new school year a meaningful spiritual dimension and reminded the children that God accompanies them on their journey.



The gathering continued with an Agape meal at a restaurant; over good food and engaging conversation, the morning came to a warm and joyful close.

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