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**Homily for Mass with Warrnambool and District Schools Network for beginning of school year  
at Koroit, January 28, 2014**

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Last Sunday evening, there was an Australia Day Fireworks Display at Lake Wendouree in Ballarat. I went along to watch the show, together with thousands of other people who watched from all around the lake. There were bursts of colour in the sky as the fireworks exploded – reds and blues and greens and sparkling silver. To add to the scene the evening was very calm and the water of the lake was still, so the fireworks in the sky were reflected on the surface of the lake. There were many oohs and aahs in the crowd as the spectacle lit up the whole area. As well as watching the show, a lot of people also had their mobile phones out and were taking photos of the fireworks.

I was sitting on the bank in the middle of a group of families and I noticed that the children particularly seemed to be fascinated by the flashes of colour as well as by the boom of the fireworks as they exploded. The children especially seemed to have a sense of wonder as they watched. They seemed to be absorbed in the display.

As we celebrate the beginning of the School Year, I hope we could have something of that sense of wonder as we approach the year ahead. This might be especially so for the younger students because for them so much will be new. They will be meeting new people and studying new subjects. May they be blessed with a sense of wonder as they experience life and learning in new ways. But I hope this sense of wonder is not just reserved to the younger students. I hope everyone will be blessed with a sense of wonder – students, parents and teachers – as we move along in what is meant to be a fascinating experience of learning day by day.

As we begin this school year, the Scriptures provide us with some wonderful messages that we can carry into the days and weeks and months ahead.

The verses we heard a few moments ago from the gospel according to John give us an extraordinary assurance of God's love. Jesus says to his followers: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." He is telling us that we are loved so much. As God the Father loves the Son, so Christ loves us. This assurance that we are loved is a great foundation for all we do, including all we do at school.

The verses we heard from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians are a great guide for our relations with one another. How should we treat each other? "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." If we could follow this guide in the relations between students and teachers, in the relations among students themselves, in the relations between teachers and parents, we would be sowing the seeds for a very fruitful school year all round.

As we begin this school year may we have the gift of wonder at all this year might bring. May we have confidence in God's personal love for us. May we be a community in which there is real love for one another, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."