

Catholic Schools

“The Catholic community is encouraged at every level to support the work of our Catholic elementary and secondary schools, keeping them available and accessible to as many parents as possible. Therefore, we the Catholic bishops of the United States strongly encourage our clergy and laity to market and support Catholic elementary and secondary schools as one of our church’s primary missions.” (***Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium***, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 13, 2005, p.15).

Throughout the pages of Holy Scripture the many miracles of Jesus give us a glimpse of His tremendous love for each one of us. Jesus made the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the blind to see, those without speech to talk, and He even called the dead back to life. In addition to these physical cures, Jesus forgave sin and imparted His mercy and bestowed His compassion. But throughout all these manifestations of His divinity as the Son of God, Jesus was always and everywhere the teacher. He came to teach us about His heavenly Father, to instruct us in a new way of life built upon those two great commandments to love God and to love our neighbor, to unfold for us His Magna Carta, the Beatitudes: “Seeing the crowds, he went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them...” (Matthew 5: 1-2). Jesus would then teach His disciples about love for the poor, comforting those in need, seeking justice and holiness in our lives, showing mercy and becoming peacemakers, and even enduring persecution “in the cause of right.” (*Ibid.* 3-10).

Indeed, Jesus was and is The Teacher. He taught us how to pray to “Our Father;” and to seek forgiveness from the source of all mercy. Every miracle He performed, every teaching that He proclaimed identified Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life. (Cf. John 14:6).

So it is, then, that teaching is a vital and integral part of the life of the Catholic Church. In imitation of Jesus, we are to teach as He taught. This is the primary mission of our Catholic schools: to assist parents in their role as the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of the Christian life. Our Catholic schools are committed to providing a complete education for our children which unites mind, spirit, heart and soul. In our schools, faith in Jesus provides the foundation upon which all subjects develop the human person. One has only to contemplate the great works of literature, outstanding musical settings, and the magnificent works of art, which all found their inspiration in the Christ event. In his work entitled: *The Quest for Shakespeare*, Joseph Pearce writes: “...there is a long tradition of belief that Shakespeare’s plays betray an element of Catholicism.” (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, © 2008, p. 19). In this same work, the author writes: “Dante towers to the heights of Christendom, the literary fruit of the philosophy and theology of his mentor, St. Thomas Aquinas...” (*Ibid.* p. 13). So much of our culture finds its inspiration in the message of Christianity.

Our Catholic schools are necessary institutions to fulfill the mandate of Jesus to His disciples: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.” (Matthew 28: 19-20). Building upon this theme, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the Community of Catholic Education at The Catholic University of America on April 17, 2008, stated: “Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.” Our Holy Father goes on to mention specifically the importance of Catholic schools in this work of evangelization: “The Catholic community here has in fact made education one of its highest priorities. This undertaking has not come without great sacrifice. Towering figures, like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and other founders and foundresses, with great tenacity and foresight, laid the foundations of what is today a remarkable network of parochial schools contributing to the spiritual well-being of the Church and the nation.”

Noting the rich heritage of Catholic education in our country, the Bishops of the United States have committed themselves to supporting and nurturing our Catholic schools for the benefit of our children now and into the future. But the Bishops cannot do it alone. Catholic schools need the support of our priests, religious, laity and parishes. As a community of faith, it is our mutual responsibility to assure that future generations of young people will have the opportunity to attend a Catholic school. So many of us have had this opportunity in years past; it is an opportunity that must be shared with others. To be sure, the continuation of successful and vibrant Catholic schools will require sacrifices. The question that must be asked is: “Why the sacrifice?” The answer comes to us from the voices of children. Our children ask us: “How are you helping us to prepare for our future lives?” “What moral and religious foundations are you providing for us in order to make the right decisions as we face the complexities of the modern age?” “What is the educational inheritance that you are passing on to us?” “How complete is the education that you are handing down to our generation?”

These are difficult questions, but questions that touch upon the future leadership of our communities, states, nation and world. Our young people are our hope, our successors in our chosen vocations and professions, our vision into the future. A Catholic school education is intended to equip them with Catholic principles and teachings which are timeless and open their eyes to a world both human and transcendent, ordinary and extraordinary, created by God who continues to dwell among us.

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