

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time cycle C (Catholic Schools Week)

In most every home, usually but not necessarily in the kitchen, is the special place where are kept all those things which don't go anywhere else: small things, one-of-kind-things, things which maybe we'll use again someday so we can't quite bring ourselves to throw out, but which we don't really need right this very minute, or right this very month. A catch-all place for things which we don't want to put away, because we'll use them again soon, and things that we don't want to put away, because we're not sure that we really need to keep them. This special place is called, perhaps somewhat unfairly, the junk drawer. As drawers go, it is an adventure to go through one to see what all has been left behind in it. But the main thing that separates the junk drawer from any other is organization. In most other drawers, we have either little piles, or little compartments to keep things separate. In my right hand desk drawer, I have compartments for my small paper clips, my big paper clips, my paper clamps, rubber bands, stamps, markers, business cards, pens and pencils. I don't want to have to go sifting through everything in the drawer all the time, and so the big paper clips and the little paper clips never meet. That's the way we tend to organize our lives sometimes as well, we compartmentalize things and people and activities, kind of as a way to deal with them more efficiently. It's almost like we're different people depending on whether we're at school, or at work, or at home, or in the car, or in the store. I know how I am with people selling me things, or attempting to sell me something, over the phone; and let me tell you, that guy never shows up to Lincoln Pastor's meetings. It's tempting, for a lot of people, to compartmentalize their faith as well; religion is just one more aspect of their lives, and has little or nothing to do with who they are outside of church. But our faith is not meant to be just one more compartment among many. It is meant to be the foundation for everything else in our lives, and should influence our actions from start of the day, to finish.

This weekend begins our observance of Catholic Schools Week. We are blessed not only to have a tradition of Catholic schools in our country, but especially to have a strong and affordable system in our diocese and most of all, to have two excellent schools, Saint Mary's elementary and Pius X, the central high school, to claim as our own for Saint Mary's parish. People may wonder, why invest so much of our resources and efforts into Catholic schools, when we have a public school system readily available, and which at least in a city such as Lincoln does offer quality education? It has to do with the compartmentalization of our lives, and resisting that tendency from an early age. In our

schools, our faith lays down the foundation for learning. Religion is not just “part” of the day, but the foundation of the day, and reminds us of the reason why God gave us this day. We begin the day here by dedicating all that we will do this day to God: school begins, appropriately, with Mass; offering God our worship, asking for his blessing, and being drawn into the sacred mysteries which define our lives as Catholics. Then, throughout the day, religious faith is presented not simply as one more subject, but as *the* subject that infuses all the other subjects. Finally, Catholic schools lay down the challenge for students and for their families, to live out on their own the beliefs and the graces which have been received and reinforced within the school walls. Better to have religion only in school than none at all, but best to have the lessons brought from the school, and then embraced by the home and by the family.

Our Catholic schools have an impact on how it is that our students perceive the world, just as the faith should have an impact on how all of us perceive the world. Science becomes more than merely learning facts. It’s the subject of objective knowledge, using accepted, objective criteria; such knowledge is good, because it comes from God; such knowledge is important, because it shows God’s power. The microscope and the telescope, far from challenging the faith, should reinforce the faith of all: God has made a spectacular universe, beyond our comprehension; to know that universe and this world we’re in better, is to invite greater glory and praise to him. Faith infuses subjects such as literature: certainly there is good Catholic literature to be read, excellent, moving novels and such; but mostly, having a faith-based school draws us into seeing uniquely Catholic themes. We come to notice, not only in English classes and reading classes, but in all of life and art, themes of redemption and salvation, we come to understand more profoundly the notion of sacrifice. We see what living for others can mean for us today. And faith itself, taught daily in our schools, also has an important objective element. There is so much to learn about revelation, the Bible, the Church and her teachings; learning the facts of what God has revealed, learning the facts of the history of the Church, help us to deepen the faith which is given us as a free gift from God.

But if faith impacts how we perceive the world around us, all the more so should it affect how we interact with the world around us. Both our schools and our faith call us to perfection of charity. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, love is patient, love is kind; it is not inflated, pompous, rude, or jealous; it bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. We know that going to our Catholic schools doesn’t make us perfect in love; neither does a sacramental life or a life of constant prayer automatically guarantee that

any one of us will be loving towards others. But both our schools and the faith we live as Catholics show us where our charity will lead when we choose it; they give us as our examples the saints who have gone before us, give us for our insight and instruction the teachings of the apostles. If they don't make us perfect right this very minute, they certainly point out to us the path we must choose to take if we wish to become perfect, if we desire to become not only the objects of God's love, but his means of imparting love to the rest of his world.

As we celebrate our Catholic Schools this weekend and during the coming week, I think it's important that we never take an "us versus them" approach to education, but rather to see our schools as one important way in which the Church calls us to transform the world, and one of the important means by which we are enabled to transform the world. In Luke's Gospel, we heard of how the people in the synagogue were at first intrigued with Jesus: they spoke highly of him, and were amazed at the words which came out of his mouth. But then they started to doubt, and question, and Jesus picked up on this, and told them "surely you will quote me this proverb, 'physician, heal yourself,'" and "do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum." He could pick up on their skepticism, skeptical that he was really a prophet and could truly heal the sick; and the world is still viewing him today with the same sort of skepticism. But with faith as the foundation of all the compartments of our lives—work, family, school, hobbies—we'll meet that skepticism with knowledge of our Lord, with trust in God's promises, and with the sort of charity which challenges others not to arguments, but to consider the power of faith. Jeremiah the prophet was told by God to "stand up and tell them all I command you," he would give Jeremiah the knowledge, wisdom, and strength he needed to proclaim God's message to those around him. If faith is only one small part of our lives, it will only marginally impact us. If it's the foundation upon which we build our lives, it will be the solid rock on which we stand and proclaim to the world around us that Jesus is Lord, and that Christ is the only way to peace in this world, and salvation in the world to come.

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