

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 2017 Catholic Schools Convocation

Catholic Schools Convocation

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

August 31, 2017

Well, here we are again, ready to begin a new school year. So let me begin with a warm word of greeting to those of you who have led or taught in our Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Thank you for your commitment to Catholic education – thank you for your commitment to our young people and their families. To those of you who are new principals and teachers, my warmest welcome and my gratitude for your readiness to be a part of the adventure we call Catholic education – helping a new generation of students to “rise above” – to rise above all that might hinder them, to rise above to the highest level of achievement possible, to rise above to new heights of friendship with the Lord Jesus in his Church.

Every Catholic school and every Catholic school system has a weighty responsibility to provide the best possible Catholic education. Yet, here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore that responsibility is even weightier. After all, it was in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, indeed, in this very city, where Catholic education in the United States has its deepest roots. We remember today two great Catholic educators – St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Servant of God Mother Mary Lange. Both were great pioneers and both were holy women – they laid the foundation upon which we endeavor to build.

As we begin a new academic year we seek their prayers even as we invoke the Holy Spirit upon our endeavors in the months ahead. For whom should we pray? And for what shall we pray? Surely we will pray for our students and their families. Surely we will pray for the well-being and success of our individual schools. No doubt you are praying that the year will go off without a hitch (not likely), that your students will be bright and cooperative, and that every parent-teacher meeting will go swimmingly.

These are all good things for which to pray but I would wager that Holy Spirit is asking us to go deeper and to ask for profound spiritual blessings for ourselves and our students. And in discerning and making these deeper requests of the Holy Spirit, let us be guided by the Word of God just proclaimed. For it is God's Word that always teaches us how to pray.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus tells us that we can be his followers only if we are willing to deny ourselves and to take up our cross. These words of Jesus are so familiar to us that they've lost their sting - they've lost the impact that they made on those disciples who first heard them. We often associate these words with cheerfully and patiently bearing with life's little difficulties and inconveniences - heavy traffic on the way to work, a classroom that is too hot or too cold, restless students that have had too much chocolate and technology...the list goes on...

But to the first disciples these words of Jesus conjured an image of walking, like a criminal, through the streets with a crossbeam on one's back and enduring the humiliation of the jeering crowds . . . the very thing that Jesus endured for us and for our salvation. When Jesus tells us to take up our cross, he is asking that with all our heart and soul we be his followers who participate in and emulate his self-giving love revealed most fully on the Cross. Just as Jesus gave himself up to save us, so too we are called to lose our lives, that is to say, to spend them in service to others and in your case and mine this means our students and their families.

This you do on a daily basis in doses large and small, in the every-day events of school life. Indeed what makes our Catholic schools so special and so effective is that you bring an extraordinary love to the ordinary events of the school day - a love which shapes not only your own conduct but also deeply influences your students and even helps shape their lives. For being a follower of Jesus, being a disciple, is not a mere matter of words but rather requires of you and me a pure heart, a readiness to forgive, integrity, a love of truth, evidence of Christian virtue, and a faith that leads us straight into the heart of the Church and into the heart of the Triune God.

Not surprisingly, studies show that Catholic schools make a profound difference in the faith-lives of students. Many of the young people who practice their faith, get

involved in the Church's life, help to serve the poor and the needy, and embrace a priestly or religious vocation – many of them are young people you have educated, young people who have graduated from our schools. Never doubt, even on the most difficult day, the importance of what you are doing!

So as this Mass unfolds, let us asking the Holy Spirit that we may be even more than professional educators – may we be and ever-more become disciples who follow the Lord in love and help our students to do the same.

Let our prayer to the Holy Spirit also be guided by our reading from the prophet Isaiah. In words that Jesus will later make his own, Isaiah proclaims: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me” – and indeed, it was in the Spirit that Jesus was sent into the world and it is in the same Holy Spirit that you and I are sent forth as disciples of the Lord.

So, our second prayer to the Holy Spirit is this: not only that we be disciples – ardent follower of Jesus and members of his Church – but even more-so that we be and become missionary disciples who bear witness to the faith even as we provide an excellent education. For we are called to impart to our students not merely an academic knowledge of the faith, important as that is, but indeed a love for the Lord and for his Church. We are seeking to raise up a new generation of disciples, after all, who will be ready, willing, and able to deny themselves in self-giving love and pick up their cross and follow the Lord in a love that is sacrificial. And we are seeking to influence not only our students but also their families who, in so many instances, are disconnected from the Church... We are called to help build a bridge for these families so that they too might rediscover the joy of the Gospel and strive to create truly Christian and Catholic homes.

Let me conclude by sharing what is in my heart as we invoke the Holy Spirit. Yes, I pray that you will be not only excellent educators but also missionary disciples. And yes, I pray that you will be role models in all things for your students, especially in living and practicing your faith all the time and in every circumstance. But I also offer to the Holy Spirit not a prayer of petition but a prayer of thanksgiving for you, our educators: for your ministry, for your dedication and love, and for the worlds of good that you will accomplish in the new academic year that lies ahead.

May God bless you and keep you always in his love!