

Catholic Education Convocation

Introduction

I am happy to join with Bishop Madden, Msgr. Woy and my brother priests in welcoming you, the leaders of our Catholic schools, to the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen on this, the Cathedral's patronal feast, in the midst of the 225th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

How welcome you are in this Cathedral Church which is the spiritual home of all who are part of the Archdiocesan family of faith. And what a pleasure it is for me to have this opportunity to offer my warmest thanks for your leadership and service to the mission and ministry of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"Cloud of Witnesses"

You know, we've been at this ministry for a long time! Later this morning Father Kemper will present a wonderful talk on the history of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and beyond. For now I'll content myself with mentioning the names of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Servant of God Mother Mary Lange, two pioneers of Catholic education, two holy women who laid the foundations upon which we continue to build. And it was at the Basilica of the Assumption, our nation's first Cathedral, that the bishops of the United States decided to establish parochial schools wherever possible in these United States.

Much has changed over the years; both challenges and opportunities have come the way of our beloved schools. Amid all these changes, amid all these challenges and opportunities, our schools have remained steadfast in their mission - the mission of forming and educating generations of young people: opening their minds and hearts to Christ and the Church, helping them to develop their God-given potential, and encouraging them to place their gifts at the service of others.

In our Mass today, we are surrounded by what Scripture calls, "a cloud of witnesses": Catholic educators - women and men religious; priests and bishops; lay women and laymen who have gone before us in faith and who beckon to us from eternity. While on earth they embraced various vocations yet a common commitment to the mission and ministry of Catholic education. Now they are praying with us and

for us, asking for you and me the wisdom and love that are so necessary for us to continue Catholic education in our times.

This “cloud of witnesses” is led by Mary, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, whose intercession we especially seek on this her feast day. We beg her for the grace to cherish our legacy while at the same time advancing it with integrity, courage, and love. What, then, does Mary our Queen say to us as we begin this special academic year?

The Kingdom of the Beatitudes

When we speak of Mary as “Our Queen”, various royal images may perhaps crowd upon our imaginations, such as the Crown Jewels of the British sovereigns now housed in the Tower of London. These and other such trappings of royal splendor are glitzy; perhaps we find them both fascinating and off-putting.

Mary’s Queenship consists in none of that. Rather, she is Queen because she is the Mother of Christ our King and the first citizen, so to speak, of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is to say, the Kingdom of the Beatitudes. Today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of God’s Kingdom with the birth of a Son born of a virgin, a Son, “whose kingdom will have no end.” That woman is Mary.

When Christ proclaimed the Beatitudes, he described himself and the Kingdom that he came to establish, even now. Those who are part of this Kingdom emulate the King who is poor, chaste, meek and mild, hungering and thirsting for holiness and justice, ready to suffer persecution.

Mary, sinless from the start, embodied the Kingdom of the Beatitudes, long before Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Thus it was that she shared more fully than any other in the mission that God the Father entrusted to her Son, Jesus, most especially his gift of self on the Cross by which we are saved. In her, the Word of God found perfect fulfillment and fruition.

The Upshot

What does all this have to do with us as Catholic educators? It is simply this: Mary our Queen is not distant from us but close to us in prayer. She is praying that, in the joys and frustrations of our daily labors, we will grow in the likeness of her Son, the

Christ of the Beatitudes. She is praying that we will have the spiritual resourcefulness to help form students and families we serve according to that same pattern. She wants us and our students to experience the joy of knowing & loving Christ and becoming like Him in every way.

Our schools excel not because they have an abundance of money but rather because those who are partners and participants in Catholic education strive to create a learning atmosphere marked by the truths, virtues, and values of that Kingdom of the Beatitudes. By the witness of our own lives of faith, we encourage our students to chart the course of their lives toward that Kingdom where Christ and Mary reign in the love of God the Father. This is how we raise up leaders for the Church, for our families, and for society, leaders who will help construct what successive popes have called, “a civilization of truth and love”.

Conclusion

As we begin this new academic year, we give thanks for those educators who have gone before us. And with Mary’s prayers to help us, let us joyfully re-dedicate ourselves to the life-long work of being formed so as to form others in the knowledge and love of God’s Kingdom: ‘a kingdom of truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love, and peace.’

May God bless you and keep you always in His love.