



Catholic Schools Week 2014 Homily
All Schools Mass, Sioux Falls Catholic Schools
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
January 31, 2014

What a privilege it is for me to be with you once again to celebrate Catholic Schools Week. The theme for this year is “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service”. It captures the fullness of being Catholic: we believe in faith, we use God’s gift of reason to grow in knowledge in order to discern how to live out what we believe, and then we express it each day in loving service.. Through baptism and confirmation we are all called to faith, knowledge and service, to belief, reason and love.

Pope Francis when a Cardinal wrote: “The education of children and young people is such an important task in forming them as free and responsible human beings. It affirms their dignity as an inalienable gift that flows from our original creation as children made in the image and likeness of God. And because education truly forms human beings, it is especially the duty and responsibility of the Church, who is called to serve mankind from the heart of God and in such a way that no other institution can.”

We gather today to note our acceptance of that duty and responsibility in the Diocese of Sioux Falls. Our Catholic school family includes 3 high schools, 5 junior highs, 19 elementary schools, 20 preschools associated with other schools and 3 standalone preschools. Our Catholic Schools family includes over 5,000 young people, plus hundreds of teachers and staff, volunteers and benefactors.

This is my 8th opportunity to do so. I asked myself what new can I say this year? I recall a cartoon I saw that depicted a couple leaving Church. The husband says, “The Resurrection only occurred once, but Father has resurrected that homily dozens of times.”

Yet there is value in repeating worthy thoughts. It is one form of learning – repetition. It is also an important way to remember and be grateful for the beautiful gift which Catholic education is and for those who make it possible.

Certainly you students are key family members. Hopefully you all know what a blessing it is for you to be in your Catholic school. You students have the opportunity for not just a great academic education, outstanding athletic, music, and other extra-curricular opportunities to develop your unique gifts, you have the privilege of doing so in an environment that integrates prayer, faith formation, the

presence of priests and religious and regular receipt of the sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Penance. They can help you to grow to become the whole person God created you to be. You are key members of the Catholic school family. Take advantage of your opportunity.

Let me acknowledge also the important role of parents and personal families. You sacrifice to pay the costs of Catholic education for your children. It isn't always easy or appreciated. Yet the sacrifice is worth it; ask those who went before. What a powerful influence parents can be when they not only encourage their children and support the school faculty and staff, but also join their children in receiving the sacraments and witnessing to the faith themselves.

Certainly you faculty and staff supported by volunteers and benefactors are important members of our school family. You are linked, teacher and student. Sometimes the challenge is dizzying but you keep at it out of love for those you teach and belief in what you teach. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has called teachers the greatest artists. What an apt compliment. Thank you.

How appropriate it is that we celebrate this Mass on the Memorial of St. John Bosco, patron of young people, who devoted himself by taking children into his arms as did Jesus in the Gospel, especially the poor and abandoned. His educational approach was unique for his times. He used music, study, prayer and work to develop the whole person who then could live a life of value and purpose. With advice applicable to our day, he said, "Knowledge gives more power in the exercise of good or evil, but alone it is an indifferent weapon, lacking guidance." It is the faith element of Catholic education that offers moral and practical guidance for living holy and fulfilling lives.

How then can we integrate into our school family, faith, knowledge and service? First we need to gratefully accept the gift of Catholic tradition that has been passed down to us by those who went before, not watering it down or compromising with secular theories of the day. We must be alert to the standards governments impose but never compromise our task to educate not just for college or a career, but for caring citizenship and for the salvation of souls. Secondly we need to proclaim and witness our Catholic identity with grateful hearts. Catholic education is on the front lines of the New Evangelization to share as Pope Francis has put it the joy of knowing Jesus Christ personally. That requires standing up for basic human rights in word and action, including the right to life from conception to natural death, the dignity of every person in the years in-between, for traditional marriage, for chastity, for religious freedom even when it may seem awkward or unpopular. Third, we must do everything possible to offer Catholic education to all, including those who cannot afford it. That is what St. John Bosco did. No parent wishing a Catholic education for his or her child should be denied because of finances.

Allow me to retell this story that captures the role of Catholic Schools: A king ruled a small kingdom whose only claim to fame was a great diamond that had been in the royal family for generations. It was always on display for all to see. Families made pilgrimages to view it; it had become a matter of country pride. Then one day one of the soldiers who guarded the diamond came to tell the king that though no one had touched it, the diamond was cracked. The king was devastated as were the people. He called all the jewelers of the country to come and see if anything could be done to restore it. They all agreed, nothing could be done, it was forever flawed. The king and the people were crushed. Then an old man showed up who asked to look at the diamond. He confidently told the king that he

could fix it; in fact he could make it even better than what it had been before. The king was skeptical but what else was there to do. “Give me a week and it will be done,” said the man. The king agreed. It was a long week.

Then the man appeared and gave the diamond to the king who couldn’t believe his eyes. It was magnificent. The old man had fixed it and it was better than before. He had used the crack running through the diamond as a stem and carved an intricate rose with leaves and thorns into the diamond. The king was so grateful that he offered the man half his kingdom but the old man refused. “All I did” he said “was to take something flawed in its heart and turn it into something beautiful.” He turned it into a rose, the sign of life and of hope. Our Lord Jesus Christ from the cross took our flawed humanity and offers us new life, new hope.

That is what Catholic Schools: Communities, Families of Faith, Knowledge and Service seek to do: turn each child of God into someone beautiful.

Thank you to all who make it possible. May Our Lady, Mother of us all, watch over you.