

Saint Joseph's School: Educating the Heart, Mind and Soul

In 1 Corinthians 9: 23-25, Saint Paul writes about why he does what he does as an apostle, saying: "All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it. Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one."

I love this verse, because it makes us think about what we run the race of life for.

For instance, even though we're past Christmas now, you more than likely have seen a version of Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol." Ebenezer Scrooge certainly has a lot in life, but when the spirits visit him in his large empty home at night, he sees how empty he truly is, having lost the opportunity to marry Belle choosing his career over her, and blind to the needs of his associate Bob Cratchit and his family, and seeing how he's become estranged from his family due to his greed and cold demeanor. Fortunately, his eyes are opened to what matters most.

As Catholics, we don't believe in the spirits of Christmas past, present and future, but rather another spirit, the Holy Spirit, who has among many titles the "helper." It's the Holy Spirit who helps us learn our faith at a deeper level, inspiring the Church to grow and better articulate what we believe. The Holy Spirit helps us on our faith journey to discern what matters most and to grow in holiness. And the Holy Spirit guides both our universal Church and local parishes.

The Holy Spirit though doesn't do it all. It's up to us as individuals to respond to the promptings of the Spirit. Mr. Scrooge awoke Christmas morning a changed man and then lived it out for the rest of his days because he knew what mattered more was being a good man and loving his neighbor, not being the wealthiest man in town. And it's up to you and me if you will to also be like the spirits who visited Mr. Scrooge, helping others to learn what it means to live out the faith.

I think today, we need that more than ever, because so many people young and old get the wrong message. Remember, an essential part of our faith is John 15:16, when Jesus says "it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you." God's love is unconditional; we don't have to do anything to merit it, but we respond to it because we love Him in return. The problem is our hearts are sometimes divided, and we need help sorting it all out. People can sometimes get the message too that what matters in life is "making it" - getting those perfect grades, getting onto as many sports teams as you can, getting into the perfect college and then the perfect job. And yet for all this, one still never sees a U-Haul in a funeral procession.

It's not too say these things are bad. It's just we need to have priorities, and the Catholic Schools do that in so many ways.

Having privileged now to be in four Catholic schools as a priest, I can't tell you how many great things I see day in and day out.

For one, there is the education of the soul and heart. Having Mass each week with the school children is such an honor to see how they engage in worship, and learn about our faith at a deeper level. I've also been able to visit classrooms with two wonderful dogs who've been a part of my life to talk about different aspects of the faith, and celebrate sacred moments with our young in the sacrament of reconciliation. We also have a Christmas program, not a "winter holiday" program, where they learn the real meaning of Christmas, Stations of the Cross in Lent, daily prayers led by Mrs. Kelly Roche and teachers, this week we'll be having some silent prayer and reflection time for students as we have adoration of the Holy Eucharist, which reminds us of how much Jesus loves us and is with us. And then there is also the emphasis on living out our faith in how we treat one another, as we emphasize dignity of the human person, respect and love of neighbor. On top of this, students are reminded that the love God gives us is meant to be shared with one another, which is why there is an annual service marathon to help the poor, and many other forms of outreach to those in need. Students in sixth, seventh and eight grade have social justice trips. And of course there is the instruction in the Catholic faith students receive in the classroom too. Taken together, all of these opportunities for spiritual growth help students learn how to truly run the race of life so as to win the crown of eternal life.

In terms of educating the mind, we have a curriculum that is well-balanced, helping our young people to learn language arts, math, science, music and social studies. Just this year, implemented was a new K-5 math program (focusing on problem solving and critical thinking) and social studies (focusing on magazine-style informational text vs. textbooks) curricula.

Our school is now up to 192 students in kindergarten through 8th grade, and our preschool is thriving with 60 students, which is its capacity. This year we welcomed 35 new families, with 21 new students in K-8 for in the 2019-2020 school year—new students in EVERY class this year, and 24 new preschool students.

All of this is done in conjunction with an amazingly dedicated staff. It's been such a joy to serve Saint Joseph's with Mrs. Kelly Roche, and to see how caring and hard working our teachers are who shepherd our children. The parish truly has a sense of this being a parish school as well that it has been proud to support.

As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week this week, I'd invite you to continue to learn more about our school. Keep our faculty, families and students in prayer. If you're looking at education options for your children, consider a tour (we'll have them this Sunday) or set up an appointment with Mrs. Roche. And get the word out. We have a sign in front of our parish that lets people know about our amazing church and school, we can be signs as well through our conversations, our positivity and letting people know about the great things going on at Saint Joseph's Church and School.

A big “thank you” as well to our principal Kelly Roche, our teachers, staff, volunteers and so many parents who help make our school such an amazing place. God is indeed good, all of the time!

God bless,

Fr. Paul